

Participants in the first Caribbean Sustainable Development Forum wish to:

reaffirm Caribbean multi-stakeholders' commitment to the **Paris Agreement**;

underscore that although the peoples of the Caribbean contribute to a very small percentage of the destructive greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change, they share highly in the impacts of climate change which threaten the livelihoods, security and well-being of the populations while destroying vital infrastructure, water and land resources, fisheries, coral reefs, and tourism income;

recall the outcome of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa in 2014, and the S.A.M.O.A. Pathway, in which it was stated that small states remain a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities and that they remain constrained in meeting their goals in all three dimensions of sustainable development;

stress the importance of the United Nations Global Sustainable Development Goals and related Strategy, the 2030 Agenda;

recognize that the Caribbean Region is experiencing almost a decade of rather intense economic slowdown and growing external debt, while at the same time the islands and low coastal countries are experiencing a decline in financial and technical assistance;

emphasize that ongoing global economic and financial restructuring combined with the challenge of sustainable growth, requires a shift in the approach of multi-stakeholders in the Caribbean Region towards outcome-oriented, region-wide cooperation on conservation and sustainable growth; thereby pooling public and private resources, combining technological innovations, and consequently attracting more foreign direct investment and development assistance;

further develop understanding on priority sectors and themes for regional and sub-regional cooperation and the design of region specific implementation frameworks in a multi-stakeholder setting, whereby the Caribbean Sustainable Development Forums (CSDF) may provide comprehension and participatory planning of implementations;

Priorities for Action CSDF 2017-2018

In the first CSDF meeting in Aruba, 21-23 February 2017, the 102 multiple stakeholders discussed ten interlinked priority sectors and themes for strengthened regional collaboration as follows:

1. Regional promotion of sustainable governance and greening of SME's in a public-private partnership.
2. The challenge of rebuilding fish stocks, while protecting the integrity of marine and river eco systems.
3. The challenge of conserving rainforest in cooperation with local inhabitants.
4. Regional cooperation on water management and waste management.
5. Green agriculture and healthy food promotion.

6. Sustainable and affordable energy.
7. Caribbean Master plan on Green- and eco-tourism.
8. Region-wide education and training for transformation to creative green behavior.
9. Region-wide connection of research and training institutions.
10. Financing conservation and sustainable development in the Caribbean Region.

The outcomes of the ten working sessions at the first CSDF in Aruba are attached below.

1) Regional promotion of sustainable governance and greening of SME's in a public-private partnership.

The problem:

SMEs are crucial to the economic development of the Caribbean. However, there are only few SMEs aware of the opportunities and the importance of economic activities that promote sustainability. How can we create governance and incentives that promote green enterprises and green jobs?

Toward solutions:

More innovation is needed and financial sustainability is just as important as environmental sustainability. Efforts to protect SMEs in times of shock should be prioritized.

There is a need for more effective policies. Tax credit duty free is not enough to get the SME sector moving. There should be less bureaucracy facing the SME sector and reduce or moderate monopolistic behaviors. More financing is needed for SMEs and green initiatives. Removing the barriers are more important than incentives.

More effort should be made to make businesses, especially SMEs, part of programs and projects. Also efforts should be made to promote sustainable value chains. There should be more regional experience sharing and regional cooperation on the SME agenda. There should be greater investment in training to create the workforce of the future.

The transition from brown to green economies is an opportunity for the SME sector, as is the development of green and blue economies. PPPs are an important mechanism that may be used to address the challenges of countries, both at the macro and micro levels. Neither the public sector nor the private sector is configured to effectively manage PPPs, the tourism sector can model good PPP practice.

Capacity building and networking of SMEs in different languages of the Caribbean should be supported.

2) The challenge of rebuilding fish stocks, while protecting the integrity of marine and river eco systems.

The problem:

Overfishing is a threat to the sustainability of our ocean resources. Not only fish stocks, but also marine and river ecosystems, including coral reefs and mangroves, are at risk from excessive fishing for short-term gain. In addition to the coastal protection capacities of coral reefs, they are a vast source of income from tourism, which is also being endangered.

Toward solutions:

The state of coral reefs is essentially a marine health indicator. But it says nothing about the diverse set of processes that cause coral degradation. Adoption of a Caribbean Delta Plan to save coral reefs should be taken up at international/ UN level as well.

Most problems faced by coral reefs originate from land and human activity. Today we see that in countries that have implemented protective measures for the marine environment 30 years ago, the rate of coral degradation is slow compared to countries that have not done so.

The knowledge gap between recent science and general knowledge on this topic is very large. The greatest challenge lies in getting the communication strategy right. We need to reframe the public discussion about the importance of ecological conservation for a bottom-up approach.

And the private sector must incorporate the protection of marine life in their marketing strategy. They are dependent on tourism, and consequently too on the vitality of coral reefs and marine life.

To adopt a regional approach to protect important spawning aggregations since fisheries are a shared resource in the Caribbean.

3) The challenge of conserving rainforest in cooperation with local inhabitants.

The problem:

Obviously, as far as forests are concerned, the best management practice would be to leave them untouched. However, as suppliers of energy, metals, foodstuffs, wood, and other primary goods (such as oil, iron, copper, gold, bauxite, and timber), some of the Caribbean forests are profoundly affected by increased global demand for these materials. Fed by foreign demand and investment and supported by national policies, large-scale extractive production of these raw materials is on the rise, and major parts of resource-rich countries are now under concession for exploration, while new infrastructure may provide access to the most remote areas.

Toward solutions:

Guyana has a best practice on community forest management delivered since 2006. There is a difficulty in OCTAs in accessing financing: because OCTs are not eligible to receive funding from multilateral financing mechanisms such as the GEF or the Green Climate Fund.

Countries are encouraged to report to the United Nations Forum on Forests on progress made in sustainable forest management, including through voluntary national contributions". Hence, efforts should be made to develop a **regional forest financing strategy** with a map of financing opportunities for sustainable forest management, including public international funding (e.g. GEF, Green Climate Fund) and innovative financing mechanisms (e.g. REDD+, debt-for-nature swaps); The Caribbean should explore the possibility of a multi-country project proposal on sustainable forest management and climate change.

As Caribbean SIDS are considered middle income countries (be it highly indebted), many donors do not consider them to be priority countries for accessing funding (Green Climate Fund, European Development Fund). The issue of access to conservation funding is even more complicated for Caribbean OCTs as they are considered via motherlands to belong to the donor community. The United Nations Forum on Forests, through its Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, should provide support in developing national and multi-country forest financing strategies and project proposals on sustainable forest management at the request of all countries in the Caribbean Region.

More efforts should be made to explore the opportunity of regional and South-South cooperation in terms of sharing experiences, lessons and best practices, especially in light of the similarities between countries of the region. Proposed initiatives on forest management should consider national sustainable development priorities, as well as full recognition of indigenous and local knowledge and needs.

4) Regional cooperation on water management and waste management

The problem:

Globally, the challenge of water in the 21st century is one of both quantity and quality.

As Caribbean freshwater resources are limited and face mounting pressures from drought, flooding, industrial pollution, and competition from many uses (e.g., ecosystem protection, drinking water, agriculture, energy production, recreation/ tourism), technology innovation can and should help address these water challenges and put them on a more sustainable path while supporting Inclusive Green Growth.

Toward solutions:

The use of green energy in desalination is growing. Some countries are considering to ban importation of Styrofoam (for packaging food), and real-time monitoring of water resources and water quality, which is a lot cheaper and easier now. The main opportunities include the need for the simplification of procedures for accessing funding for the sector. You can improve experience sharing and the possibilities of achieving economies of scale and more

efficient use of limited human resource by merging some utilities and going regional or sub-regional.

At the regional level, one could use CWWA or similar approaches to take the political heat off local professionals. More efforts can be made to reduce the incidents of untreated wastes entering the ocean by the promotion of best practices. More could be done to help in ground water extraction control and regulation in Aruba and similar islands by sharing best practices in other islands.

More can be done to improve waste recycling methods.

There are opportunities to share best practices in the use of green energy in water production as well as harvesting water from "back to basics" methods and to examine small wastewater treatment plants from regional best practices.

Help should be provided to strengthen urban planning in small islands as a means of protecting the resource. Also more should be done to implement ground water quality and quantity monitoring using best practices. Strengthening of utilities management by working with business and other stakeholders. Countries should adopt the "Kralendijk declaration " on coastal zone management.

5) Green agriculture and healthy food promotion.

The problem:

While export agriculture potentially can make a significant contribution to economic development in the Caribbean (and elsewhere), there is need for considerable re-thinking of the current model. The criteria for defining success in export agriculture's contribution to economic development is no longer focused on the generation of foreign exchange and economic growth. Important examples of sustainable agriculture can be found in the region, in the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia, and Cuba, among others. But these have not been widely shared or adopted throughout the Caribbean.

Toward solutions:

In addressing non communicable diseases and local production the tourism industry provides a market for healthy locally produced foods and import substitution. Cassava flour and cassava mash (grated cassava) is now used to substitute for as much as 40% wheaten flour to make muffins, bread and porridge. A similar approach can be used to substitute other locally produced crops for imported ones

Model farms which demonstrate green agriculture practices are more easily adopted by farmers. The successes of these farms also encourage partnerships with input suppliers to develop products for green agriculture.

There is a need for government support for agriculture to ensure farmers' markets are protected and to provide the enabling environment for green agricultural production.

Information on best practices of climate smart technologies needs to be shared among the countries. Farmers are reaching or have reached the point of saturation and have grown to distrust and dislike governmental bureaucracy and inefficiency. The threat of input suppliers becoming the sole source of information on technologies for farmers can lead to environmental degradation. Non-profit entities need to be more flexible and support the transfer of information about farmers' areas of interest.

Green Agriculture is still a new concept and must not become a relabeling tag of Sustainable Agriculture or Organic Agriculture. Renewable energy i.e. solar panels, have shown to be of great benefit to rural farmers. Other Climate Smart Technologies also exist, such as Geothermal cooling.

The Caribbean is a heterogeneous region with diverse production systems and will require technological applications that fit their agricultural needs. This last bit needs to be reiterated in the vision and policy platforms of CARDI, UWI, and other R&D centers.

More should be done to mainstream climate smart agriculture, incentives, financing and the use assessment and monitoring tools. The use of labeling to persuade consumers to make healthier choices was also proposed. The introduction of nutrition education for example through school feeding programs is a way of inculcating lifelong healthy eating habits to promote healthy food consumption from an early age.

Farmers are more interested in information on Ecological Resilience than potential sources of funding. In this regard, opportunities exist for the use of food wastes for the production of composts of green agriculture. Microbes could also be identified, studied and possibly utilized to help plants grow in essential nutrient-depleted topsoil.

Possible areas for regional collaboration include: the development of a platform for information sharing on best practices in climate smart and green agriculture technologies as well as the development of production models for selected crops which are targeted for import substitution, using climate smart technologies along the value chain - for example undercover production, the use of solar panels to provide power for irrigation, the use of rainwater harvesting etc. in the production system.

6) Sustainable and affordable energy

The problem:

Globally, renewable energy sources (RES) contribute to climate change mitigation through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, achieve sustainable development, protect the environment and improve citizens' health. Moreover, renewable energy is also emerging as a driver of inclusive economic growth, creating jobs and reinforcing energy security across the world.

Although most Caribbean islands and mainland countries have sufficient renewable energy sources (wind, solar, geothermal, ocean thermal, waste to energy, hydroelectric, biomass) and

even more incentives (budgetary, environmental, tourism, and health) to convert to full-fledged renewable energy, the vast majority is still primarily using imported fossil fuel to generate energy.

Toward solutions:

The priorities include the availability of energy for all.

The importance of reducing dependency on fossil fuels to create stability in energy costs.

Efforts should be made to achieve a sustainable and logical mixed-use approach through the transition to renewables.

There is a need for shared control for power production to share both costs and burdens.

More should be done to improve energy efficiency at the single-user and larger scales.

Technology development for renewables needs to improve, with support for technology ventures in the region.

More should be done to provide education and training for the region, including both technical and management aspects.

Also more work on communications to public on how energy works in the region is important.

There should be work to decrease isolation and “silo” effects to improve knowledge exchange.

The Centre of Excellence in Aruba can be used to promote regional cooperation.

7) Caribbean Master plan on Green- and eco-tourism

The problem:

Tourism is the leading economic sector in most of the countries of the Caribbean. But the expansion of mass tourism threatens the biodiversity and natural environment of the region, ultimately undercutting the basis for future tourism as well as local livelihoods.

Being a biodiversity hotspot, the Caribbean supports a range of rich ecosystems, many of which are threatened. On the other hand it remains true that the region is under-funded and has been negatively impacted by mass tourism. However, both government and the local tourist industry in the region are committed to develop eco-tourism

Toward solutions:

Promote sustainable tourism in all forms, social, cultural, economic and environmental.

Should expand the Caribbean sustainable tourism framework which will serve as a guide from which countries can develop their own plans and policies.

There is a need to require socio-economic and environments impact assessments in tourism development.

Support initiatives to green the tourism sector, in approaches to water, waste management, solid waste and energy management.

Carrying capacity should be carefully assessed in terms of tourism development planning.

Building codes and land use planning should be enforced.

Tourism management should address as part of its model, emergency preparedness, with a special emphasis on safety and security of visitors.

Connect with national disaster management institutions and CDEMA and support community search and rescue teams.

8) Region-wide education and training for transformation to creative green behavior

The problem:

Sustainability depends on everyone's behavior. There is a need to refine and promote the vision of, and transition to, sustainable development, through all forms of education, public awareness and training.

Toward solutions:

Greater diversity in communication formats. Could establish a clearing house for green education materials for sharing. Use an app for this.

A Caribbean flavor is a must. A feature length film on the coral reefs (title: An inconvenient truth for coral).

Internships in the Caribbean from other global areas to promote training in the Caribbean.

Transfer of skills between education institutions, such as in the areas of diving or under water welding.

Encourage people in the Caribbean to include the Ocean and the Caribbean sea as permanent part of their livelihood.

Develop awareness of careers and new industries that come from the blue economy.

Work on vocational training programs for Ocean careers, not just scientists.

Private partners need to be more readily approached and utilized to spread the education materials

9) Region-wide connection of research and training institutions

The problem:

There are many small applied research and training institutions in the region, but they often work in isolation from each other and are delinked from research in related fields of Caribbean ecological, economical, livelihood and socio-cultural sustainability concerns. It is far more efficient for our small societies to approach issues from a multi-disciplinary and coordinated regional or sub-regional perspective.

Toward solutions:

We need to keep facilitating people around regionally common agendas/topics. Examples of this are regional events such as the TNO Coastal Bonaire conference and NOAA coral initiative connecting researchers and regionally relevant initiatives or online platforms such as the Caribbean Knowledge and learning network.

Local institutions bring indigenous knowledge and can help develop locally appropriate solutions. However, because of the small scale and limited resources we have to be realistic. It makes sense to link with larger international institutions where they can bring in research and innovation and where the local Caribbean entity brings in the local knowledge to translate to locally appropriate solutions. Examples are Carmabi-University Amsterdam and TNO-Caribbean – TNO NL as local institutions with larger outside Caribbean based partners.

Knowledge is power but in order for centers of expertise to function we have to be willing to share information and willing to collaborate. To assess whether a network relationship may work you have to consider the 4 Cs: Common Goal; Complementary; Capacity to collaborate; and Compatible culture to share

We have to recognize the institutions we have in the region and should establish partnerships. Therefore, we need more collaboration, rather than a transformation.

We may want to focus on being good and sharing proven practices, things that work. Resources are of course always an issue, to bring entities together and link them. People or organizations need to free up resources and time to make this happen, coordinate and share. Donor support can be of great help. However, it is also important that we create continuities and find ways to institutionalize the sharing of good practices.

Aruba's center of excellence would be very willing to contribute in leading an exercise to do an overview/inventory/stocktaking of various research institutions.

10) Financing conservation and sustainable development in the Caribbean Region

The problem:

The Caribbean Region remains saddled with low growth, high debt burdens, and fragile financial institutions. The region did not create the problems of unsustainable market activity and hence cannot afford to solve its problems without outside assistance.

Toward solutions:

There is a need to reduce administrative burden of different project reporting formats. The Green Climate Fund reporting could prove to be very challenging for small states. Need to have simple reporting formats for small grants for NGOs and CBOs. Regional capacity and global capacity should be drawn on for helping with project formulation and implementation.

More attention should be paid to disaster risk reduction.

There should be a facility for SME support.

There should be a reconsideration of debt to GDP ratios taking into consideration specifics of SIDS dynamics. Look for scaling debt for adaptation swaps.

Study ways to promote more bottom-up planning.

Analyze problems related to OCT status.

Reconsider the present categorization of Caribbean small states being middle income.

Establishing the CSDF as a Caribbean Collaboration Network of the Willing.

At the end of the first Caribbean Sustainable Development Forum, participants committed themselves to remain involved in multi-stakeholders collaboration for conservation and inclusive sustainable growth in the region, establishing the CSDF as a more permanent platform of voluntary members, aiming at joint action to conserve the Caribbean Region (sea and soil) and to move it forward in implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In addition, participants have welcomed the invitation by Mr. Rainieri of the Punta Cana Group to host the next CSDF in 2018 in Punta Cana, and suggested that until then the CSDF Secretariat in Curacao should keep the momentum by pro-active information sharing.

Oranjestad, 23 February 2017

Participants in the first CSDF

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