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**DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED FOREST MANAGEMENT
AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS PROJECT IN ST.VINCENT
AND THE GRENADINES: A CASE STUDY**

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Introduction

This study focuses on the use and relevance of participatory planning approaches and methods to the management of forestry conflicts, using the case of the process used by the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to develop a major forest management and development programme. This process took place between April 2001 and June 2002, under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture and its Forestry Department, with funding from the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and with technical assistance from the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and the FAO. It resulted in the preparation of a comprehensive programme and funding proposal, which will be used over the next few months as the basis for the establishment of an integrated forest management and rural livelihoods project.

Following a brief presentation of the issues of forest management and rural development that currently affect the country, including the widespread illegal cultivation of marijuana on state lands, the study looks at the reasons why the participatory approach was used to design this project, how the planning process was conducted, and the results that were obtained. It seeks to extract general lessons that could be relevant to other countries and situations, thus helping to improve the effectiveness of forest management in the Caribbean and other regions.

The place

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is part of the Windward Islands, in the eastern Caribbean. Saint Vincent is a mountainous island of 133 sq. miles, culminating at 1,234 m of altitude with the peak of the active Soufriere volcano. The small island chain of the Grenadines extends between the larger islands of Saint Vincent and Grenada, and as many as 8 inhabited islands are part of the state of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The country's capital is Kingstown, located on Saint Vincent south-western coast.

These islands were first inhabited by Arawaks and Caribs, and European colonisation began in the late 17th century. Their modern history is largely a product of their geography. The islands of the Grenadines were too small to support the establishment of the plantation system that prevailed in most parts of the Caribbean region over the past three hundred years, and they have developed a predominantly maritime society and economy; in the past three decades, tourism has become the main component of their economy. On the island of Saint Vincent, coffee, tobacco and sugar plantations were established by British and French colonists, but the ruggedness of the terrain prevented the expansion of these plantations to large parts of the island, and made it impossible for the large-scale plantation economy to survive following the drastic changes of the

mid-19th century (abolition of slavery, injection of large capital, introduction of steam power and other technologies produced by Europe's industrial revolution, and consequent concentration of land into larger estates and sugar production into central factories).

Consequently, the island of Saint Vincent presents a number of geographic and socio-economic features that distinguish it from most of its neighbours. After European colonisation, a significant Amerindian population remained in the north of the island, where runaway slaves also found refuge. Their interaction gave birth to the Karifuna people, people of African descent who had acquired many cultural traits of the Amerindians. The large majority of the Karifunas were deported from Saint Vincent to Honduras, in 1792, in order to permit the expansion of colonial settlements in the north of the island.

Another important characteristic of Vincentian society is the importance of small farming systems, as a result of the early dismantling of most large estates. Saint Vincent's peasantry is strong, rooted in a short but dense history of resistance, resilience and adaptation to changes in the regional and global economic environment.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1979. It is governed under the Westminster system, with a Governor-General appointed by the United Kingdom and a government headed by a Prime Minister. In the general elections of 2001, the United Labour Party, which had been in opposition for more than two decades, won 12 out of a total of 21 seats in the Parliament, and formed the government, now headed by Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonzalves. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a member of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and is part of the Commonwealth.

The problem

Deforestation has been a constant feature of Saint Vincent's modern history, with the most intensive removal of the natural vegetation cover having taken place in the early years of European colonisation, at the time of the establishment and expansion of estates. A more recent wave of deforestation took place in the 1980s and 90s, with the expansion of banana cultivation. Private lands that were either forested or devoted to mixed farming systems were turned into banana fields. Significant portions of the state-owned forests were also turned into banana fields, either through illegal squatting, or with the informal blessing of politicians who encouraged or allowed people to use portions of state property.

The forest resources of Saint Vincent are critically important to national and community development. The country currently depends entirely on surface water for its domestic, agricultural and industrial supply, and all catchment areas are located within forest reserves. Saint Vincent's rainforest is rich in biological diversity. Timber production is not a major activity, but it supports a number of local artisans and has the potential to grow in economic importance. There are also a number of locally important non-timber forest products. Deforestation not only reduces these ecological and economic functions, but it also causes major impacts on other ecosystems, through erosion and siltation.

It is estimated that Saint Vincent has lost a large proportion of its forest cover over the past twenty years. Deforestation is caused by several factors, the two most important being the illegal cultivation of marijuana, and the cultivation of bananas.

The banana industry has dominated the country's agricultural sector and has been a primary contributor to the Gross Domestic Product and the main source of foreign exchange income since the 1950s. Until the early 1990s, banana exports benefited from preferential access to the United Kingdom, with a guaranteed market at favourable prices within a national export quota. Throughout the period, banana farming was a profitable activity that provided significant opportunities to farmers, even those producing on a very small scale.

Since the early 1990s, the Windward Islands banana industry, including Saint Vincent's, has been subject to processes of globalisation. Neo-liberal trade reform and the creation of a single European market have made the industry increasingly precarious. During the 1990s, the Windward Islands' banana industry lost its preferential access to the British market, the European Union's New Banana Regime increased the cost of banana production, and trade disputes both within the EU and between it and other banana producing countries have led to increased market competition. This year, the European Union's regulatory framework for bananas expires and new, potentially more restrictive, import rules will be established.

In the last twenty years, marijuana (ganja) cultivation has become another economic mainstay for the Vincentian economy, and it has become a livelihood option for a significant number of the country's unemployed and underemployed workforce. For many of these growers, the dividends have been substantial. They have derived income, and in some cases, achieved a standard of living that would have been unattainable for them in the island's formal economy. Money from ganja production is an important source of foreign exchange and has helped support the nation's commercial sector through a decade of economic problems.

At the same time, ganja production has become a social problem. Growers have become stigmatised as criminals, and risk prosecution because the crop is illegal. Men who work in ganja are not always successful, and some are exploited as cheap labour. Those who traffic the crop from Saint Vincent to other islands take the greatest risk of all – it is not uncommon for them to simply vanish. Finally, ganja production has become a major cause of deforestation and a threat to the nation's water supply. The crop is grown on squatted land in the country's forest, and in many cases, high in the island's watersheds. Thus, ganja cultivation is a major environmental problem, and it is an illegal activity; but it is also an economic mainstay for many, and a significant but indirect contribution to the economic well being of others.

The legal responsibility for the management of state-owned forests and the biological resources they contain rests with the Forestry Department, and is based on two main pieces of legislation, namely the Forest and Resource Conservation Act No. 47 of 1992, and the Wildlife Protection Act No. 16 of 1987. While the Forest and Resource Conservation Act transformed the former Forestry Division into a Department, it is only in 1998 that this decision was implemented. The legislation requires that the Department prepare a ten year Forest Resource Conservation Strategic Plan. The Forestry Department is currently responsible for the management of the

Government's forest resources, which include a number of forest reserves, wildlife reserves and recreation sites, including a number of beaches. The central mountainous region is subdivided into three forest regions: the Soufriere Forest Reserve, the Mesopotamia Forest Reserve, and the Colonarie Forest Reserve.

The Wildlife Protection Act provides for the appointment of a Chief Wildlife Protection Officer who will be responsible for the management of wildlife and the administration and enforcement of the Act. Until this officer is appointed, the Chief Forest Officer has the responsibility for carrying out these duties. The Act provides for the establishment of wildlife reserves, including a Parrot Reserve covering an area of 7,596 acres (3,075 hectares) that includes the Upper Buccament Valley, the Upper Cumberland River Valley, and the Upper Colonarie River Valley. A separate parcel of some 3,690 acres (1,490 hectares) lying to the north and bounded by the Peak of La Soufriere is also included in the Reserve.

While the responsibility for the management of forested watersheds rests with the Forestry Department, the Central Water and Sewerage Authority is responsible for the collection, treatment, storage and distribution of water. It is therefore directly concerned with forest management issues, and is directly affected by deforestation and its impacts of water catchments and flows.

Issues of security and law enforcement fall directly under the responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs and its Police Force. Over the past five years, the Regional Security System (a grouping of security forces from Barbados and the eastern Caribbean) and the United States military have been involved in marijuana eradication campaigns on Saint Vincent. These efforts have caused temporary reductions in the cultivation and production of marijuana, with significant impacts on production patterns and market prices.

This brief background suggests that forest management issues in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are extremely critical, and difficult to tackle. In spite of all their efforts, agencies responsible have not been able to control and arrest deforestation, and conventional enforcement practices have often had perverse results, exacerbating social conflicts, threatening the livelihoods of the poor, and provoking more negative environmental impacts, as illegal farmers were being pushed to the hills and to steeper slopes in order to protect their crops.

The planning and programme development process

The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has for a number of years been aware of the complexity and seriousness of this situation, and of the need to find alternative means of resolving these problems. Having witnessed the failure of conventional approaches to forest management in general, and to the control of illegal marijuana farming in particular, the Ministry of Agriculture and its Forestry Division decided, in the late 1990s, to develop fresh strategies for addressing these issues.

This decision has been backed by clear commitments from the political directorate, on the basis of well-informed guidance coming from technicians within the Ministry. In the Throne Speech that he delivered on 13 December 1999, for example, the Governor General expressed the need

for a “policy framework in which all stakeholders will have an input into this very delicate problem”. Throughout the years 1999 and 2000, formal meetings and informal discussions took place at various levels, progressively generating a consensus on the need for a participatory approach to dealing with these issues. Aware of the importance of non-partisan political support, policy advisors and technicians skilfully involved all key actors in these debates, making sure that the basis for this new approach would have been agreed upon before the general elections of 2001, while postponing the formal launching of a new initiative until after these elections.

The Forestry Department has been at the forefront of the efforts to develop this new approach, because of the commitment of most of its staff to the principles of participation, and because of its awareness of the fact that the “old way” simply did not work. Forestry personnel, including field rangers, are well aware of the issues of deforestation in the country, and the dilemma they face when trying to perform their duties and to address the issue of illegal cultivation. For obvious reasons, growers actively discourage forestry personnel and others from going into the forest. This prevents rangers from being able to adequately assess the status of the forest, the watershed and the plants and animals that are endemic and possibly threatened. At the same time, foresters understand the economic issues that brought growers into the forest. Finally, they know the growers. In many cases they grew up and went to school together, and in some cases they may be relatives and friends. Such conditions make it apparent why any attempt to sustain the country’s remaining forest has to begin by bringing ganja growers, as well as all other stakeholders, into the discussion.

In January 2001, discussions were held between the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and the FAO, and it was agreed that a strategic planning process would be initiated, for the purpose of defining a long-term forest management initiative. The planning process was articulated around the following elements:

- *a steering group*: it was agreed that the success of this process would depend, to a large extent, on the quality and legitimacy of its leadership. A small steering group was therefore constituted, comprising representatives of both government and civil society. In its first meetings, the group: (a) established its terms of reference, (b) prepared a detailed work plan, (c) conducted a stakeholder identification exercise, (d) developed a communication plan and (e) conducted a scoping exercise to identify key issues, main impacts and root causes;
- *information gathering and analysis of issues*: it was also decided that the process should be supported by on-going research, beginning with a literature review and interviews with key informants. Position and discussion papers were therefore developed, and provided the basis for policy analysis and programme formulation within the steering group;
- *consultation of stakeholders*: this was conceived as a series of formal and informal consultations with stakeholders to identify views, needs, expectations and concerns. These consultations were held in various geographic communities, and special efforts

were made to include all relevant groups and sectors;

- *public awareness*: throughout the process, a small number of communication activities were implemented, for the purpose of generating interest and feedback, encouraging participation and increasing demand for the project and its activities;
- *project design*: in order to involve key stakeholders in the actual design of the project, while ensuring that the design of the project would meet the specific requirements of donor agencies, it was agreed that the process would also include: (a) a scoping workshop, held in April 2001, where issues were identified and discussed, and where the general objectives of the project were identified, (b) a project design workshop, held in June 2002, which identified all main components of the project, and made general recommendations regarding implementation mechanisms, and (c) the recruitment of an expert who would take responsibility for drafting a project document, under the guidance of the steering committee;
- *policy support and donor relations*: throughout the process, communication was maintained with the political directorate in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and with the donor community, to generate support for the process and to ensure commitment to the implementation of the conclusions that would result from it.

The community consultations were facilitated by forestry personnel, and generated lively debates. In these discussions, people raised a number of concerns and views. The most salient points were:

- There is a clear awareness of the issue of deforestation and its impact on the economy and society. People in rural communities have observed that poor farming practices are resulting in erosion.
- People however feel that there is a need for more public education, especially as it relates to possible solutions to environmental issues.
- While deforestation is an issue, people also want attention to be paid to environmental conditions around towns and villages, which affect them directly.
- Among these issues, the pollution of rivers by solid waste and agro-chemicals is a major source of concern.
- These environmental issues cannot be divorced from the reality of high unemployment in rural communities.
- Forest management work should therefore also be concerned with the creation of alternative sources of employment.
- Opportunities for community-based tourism development should be explored more actively.
- There is a need for improved arrangements for the marketing of agricultural produce.
- The Forestry Department and other government agencies need to be more visible and more involved in management and development initiatives on the ground.
- There is a need for more input by the community into the management of forest resources.

While these consultations were underway, data gathering and research activities were also carried out, according to the plan developed at the April 2001 workshop, and outlined as follows.

Research questions	Methods	Main products
What is the policy context within which this project will be developed?	Steering Committee to review the conclusions of the FAO study of forest policy, and then advise on the need for update or further research	This activity was not carried out until the final phase of project design, when the legal context was reviewed, and needs for legal reform were identified
What is the current base of information?	Forestry Department to collect all relevant documents and conduct a review of published literature and other documents	This revealed that the information base is limited, and that the project should include a strong research, monitoring and evaluation component
What are the key livelihood issues that the project should be concerned with? What is the socio-economic context that the Project should take into account? What are some of the social issues which are at the root of forest use patterns? What is the social impact of current forest uses?	Researcher contracted to conduct a scoping study of rural livelihood issues	Report on livelihood issues
	Researcher contracted to conduct a preliminary study of the anthropology of marijuana cultivation	Report on the anthropology of marijuana cultivation in Saint Vincent
What are the key environmental and natural resource management issues that the project should be concerned with?	Researcher contracted to conduct this scoping study	Report on environmental and resource management issues
What is the macro economic context within which the project will be developed, and what are the economic alternatives available to rural communities?	Researcher to develop background paper, and workshop to discuss and define options.	Report on macro-economic context

Outcomes of this process

The most direct and tangible outcome of this planning process is a comprehensive programme proposal for an integrated forest management and rural livelihood project. This document has been submitted to and approved by the steering committee, and is currently serving as the basis for negotiations with donor agencies. Thanks to the structure of the planning process, this document reflects the views of a wide range of stakeholders. Because they have been involved in the process, these stakeholders now appear committed to the implementation of this programme. One significant aspect of this is the fact that people involved in marijuana cultivation were directly involved, and have expressed their commitment.

The second outcome of this process is that there is now a much better understanding of the issues that the country has to confront. Too often, projects and programmes are designed in the absence of a thorough analysis of the issues and their root causes. In this case, the Forestry Division and all other partners have been well served by their early decision to take time, and to ensure that the design of the project would be informed by a serious understanding of the problem. In many respects, this project development exercise has also been a policy development exercise. It has examined the issues, has used this analysis to develop general policy directions, and has translated these policy directions into a coherent plan of action.

Another benefit of this process, perhaps less tangible, but very palpable at the time of the second workshop in June 2002, is the emergence of a community of interest among very diverse stakeholders. While people and organisations continue to hold their views, and while these views often differ, the fact that people who do not normally communicate have been able to work together, to express their opinions, and to listen and respond to the views of others has generated a sense of common purpose. It has confirmed the value of visioning as the basis for participatory planning: people may have different backgrounds, needs and strategies, but they can share a common vision and common targets, even when they follow different routes to reach these targets.

With specific reference to the ganja issue, this process has definitely impacted on the way the issue is perceived at different levels of society. It has also impacted on the relationships between the Forestry Division and ganja farmers, and between the Forestry Division and the rest of the Ministry of Agriculture. In this process, the visible and tangible involvement of a community leader and development activist with links with and high credibility among marijuana producers has been critical. It has helped in the process of inclusion, and it has demonstrated that there is often a need to make personal concessions and collective efforts in order to reach difficult goals.

Lessons learned

There are a number of valuable lessons that can be extracted from this experience. These can be summarised as follows:

- In most instances, forest management issues find their origin outside the forestry sector, and their solution therefore requires interventions that go far beyond traditional forest management interventions. In broad-based participatory approaches to forest management, there is a need for institutional arrangements that go beyond traditional sectoral

responsibilities, and that involve a range of institutions and organisations. In cases, the lead for the management of critical forest issues and conflicts may even have to be placed outside forestry administrations.

- In some cases, forest management issues are determined by forces that are much bigger than the country itself. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, deforestation, reductions in water supply and rural poverty are the direct consequences of globalisation, the decline of the banana industry as a result of global trade liberalisation, and the drug laws and policies of other countries. In these instances, the most important contribution that the local planning and management process can make is to develop a common understanding of these forces, and to build local capacity to cope. In this process, local forms of resilience, from passive resistance to the development of alternative production strategies, should be understood and built upon.
- In conflict situations, the planning process can help in addressing the issues, by revealing their extent, their causes and their impacts, by allowing people to talk to each other, by reducing intransigence, by building an awareness of “the other side of the argument” – an understanding that obstinacy would be fruitless ultimately. In this process, participation also helped stakeholders to realize that, in many instances, those perceived as being on opposite sides of the argument were actually expressing similar concerns, thoughts and conclusions, that parties in this conflict are not so far apart, but that the lack of communication is partly responsible for the severity of the conflict.
- Participatory planning and conflict management take special dimensions in small societies, where social rules are difficult to break, where people and their actions are easily known, where parties in a conflict are often part of the same social and kinship networks. This makes the work of organisations such as the Forestry Department particularly difficult, and it makes it practically impossible for them to perform enforcement and development functions simultaneously. This has practical implications for the distribution of roles and responsibilities among organisations.

In planning and management processes, there is a need to make sure that highly visible conflicts and management issues, such as the negative impacts of marijuana farming on forest resources in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, do not occult less prominent yet significant issues. Forest management is a process that needs to focus on a range of objectives. In this process, there could have been the danger of focusing exclusively on marijuana farming, but the participatory process – informed by the knowledge and experience of foresters and farmers – reminded all actors that there were a number of other issues to address.