

NAME: EZBAI FRANCIS

SCHOOL: VIEUX FORT COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

COUNTRY: SAINT LUCIA

TOPIC: Are we doing enough to promote sustainable use of our local products and natural resources and in so doing, promoting self-sufficiency in the OECS?

“Sustainable use of our local products and natural resources,” refers to the utilisation of available resources of the country, (in this case the islands of OECS), such as forests, at a rate which will meet the needs of the present without impairing the needs of the future generation. If OECS islands were to, wisely, take advantage of the renewable resources around them, they would become less dependent on countries outside the OECS for basic resources, thus promoting self-sufficiency.

In 1980, the OECS sub region experienced almost 5.6% growth per year for a decade, driven mainly by tourism and banana exports. However growth has been slowly decreasing since the early 1990s, thus resulting in the decline of productivity, growth and private investment. If this trend continues, and it is expected to do so with the current economic crisis, the region would have to find innovative means to reduce import levels.

The Heads of the OECS need to place more emphasis on local produce, not only internationally but also within the Caribbean nations themselves. Governments currently are not developing the agricultural sectors sufficiently. They are not encouraging the citizens of the country to improve, expand, manufacture and market the countries’ local goods and services.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) obligates that member states protect and preserve the marine space. For instance, the member states need to do more to encourage the sustainable management and exploitation of the ocean resources. OECS countries can come together to help develop specific areas for the breeding of certain aquatic

animals like the lobster, without damaging or threatening the marine space. If these measures were to be implemented, the OECS islands would be able to benefit in a variety of ways. More seafood would be available for local consumption and export, generating foreign exchange. Moreover, events such as the Dennery Fish Fiesta in St. Lucia could be developed to enhance the entertainment sector of the tourism industry, attracting visitors to the islands. This concept could be adopted by other OECS islands, but modified so as to fit the different cultures of the member states. Arrangements could be made for tourists to “*island hop*” so that they can experience all the flavours and uniqueness of the different foods and experiences of the islands.

The countries of the Caribbean had a food import bill of \$3 billion in 2006 and this vast sum is sure to have increased with the global crisis. The residents of the OECS cannot keep paying so much for food when there is available agricultural land in the countries that can be used to cultivate food that can be consumed locally and exported. I walked into a supermarket once and on the shelf sat a box of *tamarinds* with a handsome price tag. To my surprise many locals were rushing to purchase the rather expensive commodity. Meanwhile, outside, their own *tamarind trees* were bending over with the weight of the *tamarinds* in them. In my opinion the *tamarinds* from the trees outside in the community were sweeter, bigger, ripened on the vine and most importantly free. The commodities being imported by business owners are being presented in such a way, that they seem superior to local produce. If the locally grown fruits and vegetables were readily available and packaged like their foreign counterparts then the citizens would be more eager to consume them.

The banana industry, also known as “The Green Gold”, of the island of St. Lucia has been the main export produce of the country from the 1960s. Unfortunately, global competition from other countries, for instance Latin America, has caused a decline in the amount of bananas exported internationally. The Government of St. Lucia as well as the Governments of the OECS countries can encourage the development of innovative ideas to promote the crops. Apart from packaging the bananas to global standards, the governments can take a risk and recommend that more farmers grow their crops organically. If this type of cultivation were to be advocated, the island could begin to meet the increase in the demand for a supply of *organic bananas* on the world market. This increase in demand could lead to an increase in exports and thus an increase in foreign exchange. Whilst some may argue that it takes years for all the previous chemicals used in soil to be completely washed away, we need to understand that the use of organic farming in the long run is going to benefit the entire country. There would be fewer reasons to import inorganic fertilizers, thus cutting back on the money spent by governments each year; the bananas could also be sold at a higher price, giving the farmers the opportunity to earn more money. It is also a more efficient way of maintaining soil quality.

The islands of the OECS have the opportunity to encourage self sufficiency among member states by thinking forward. The member states possess sufficient resources and have the ability to implement more effective and profitable ways of using those resources. “The freedom to move forward to new opportunities and to produce results comes from living in the present not the past,” by Brian Koslow.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S State Department, July 23 2010, “Background Note: Saint Lucia”.

Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Terms of Reference for Development of a Model Framework for Sustainable Oceans Governance in OECS Member States.

Amanda Banks, Tax-News.com, London, May 2010, “OECS to Remove Export Subsidies”.

Lera Pascal, The Commonwealth Secretariat, Gender and Trade, “Banana Production in Saint Lucia”.