

Agriculture in the Caribbean:

FACING THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE



Panel at the workshop inauguration in Georgetown, Guyana.

April 26, 2008

From April 14-25, top researchers from a wide range of Caribbean countries gathered in Georgetown, Guyana, for intensive technical training in the assessment of climate change impacts in the agricultural sector. The purpose of this training is to be better able to provide decision-makers in each country and at the regional level with scientific data to guide development planning. In the agricultural sector, this is becoming an increasingly urgent task, as food scarcity and high prices are causing violent social unrest in Haiti and numerous other developing countries.

The training workshop was conceptualized and organized by the CARICOM Climate Change Centre (CCCCC), in close coordination with Cuba's National Institute of Meteorology (INSMET). A team of three INSMET specialists, led by world-renowned agro-meteorologist Roger Rivero Sr., conducted the training sessions. Participants included agro-meteorologists and other scientists from the English-speaking, Dutch-speaking and Spanish-speaking Caribbean: altogether 38 participants from 17 countries. The University of Guyana generously lent its computer lab to this group for the hands-on training sessions.



The team of Cuban trainers from INSMET, left to right: Roger Rivero Jr., Arnoldo Bezanilla, and Roger Rivero Sr.

In addition to the CCCCC and INSMET, sponsors of this workshop included the Commonwealth Secretariat, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FAO, UNDP and the latter's Caribbean Risk Management Initiative (CRMI).

At the workshop's inauguration, Dr. Marlene Cox, Director of the Guyanese government's Office of Resource Mobilisation and Planning, noted that the geography of low-lying states such as Guyana makes them highly vulnerable to climate change. This country has been increasingly troubled by extensive floods which wreak havoc on its mainly agricultural economy, and on the daily lives of people. However, Guyana's geography and frequent rains also position the country as the region's pre-eminent producer and exporter of rice, a staple crop for the majority of the world. Dr. Cox declared that capacity-building is a key element for making the best of Guyana's unique strengths and vulnerabilities, to help governments make decisions with far-reaching implications.



Specialists from 17 Caribbean countries participated in the workshop.

Dr. Neville Trotz, Science Advisor at the CARICOM Climate Change Centre, based in Belize, noted that sectors such as agriculture, tourism and water management are key to livelihoods and well-being in the Caribbean region, and these sectors are endangered by the volatility of climate change. Therefore it is critical to teach people how to use climate change information for planning.



The University of Guyana's computer lab hosted the two-week training workshop.

Participants in the workshop conducted exercises using data generated by the PRECIS Caribe data base, which runs UNFCC climate change scenarios up to the year 2100. This data base was created and is managed by INSMET in Cuba, and with support from CRMI is now accessible in English and French, as well as the original Spanish.



The delegate from St. Lucia.

UN Resident Coordinator for Guyana, Aboubacry Tall, spoke on behalf of the United Nations system at the workshop inauguration, as co-sponsors of the workshop include both UNDP and FAO. Mr. Tall noted that the UNDP's Human Development Report this year focuses on the issue of climate change, given the serious dilemmas that it poses for people's well-being and even survival. He stressed that the problems caused by climate change cannot be addressed by any one country or institution, rather they require partnership. Therefore he was heartened to see that the Caribbean region is working in an increasingly coordinated fashion, with leadership from the CCCCC, to grapple with climate change.

Janet Strachan, in representation of the Commonwealth Secretariat, reiterated the need for partnership and coordination among developing countries as the best approach for grappling with the global effects of climate change. She noted that to this end the Secretariat promotes networking among Small island Developing States (SIDS).



Representatives from the Dominican Republic and Belize (left and right).