



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Trinidad and Tobago to host international meetings on nature and the economy in the run up to Rio+20

Port of Spain, (The Cropper Foundation, University of the West Indies and the Ministry of Planning and the Economy), 17 May 2012. One month before world leaders come together to talk about the green economy at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Trinidad and Tobago will host two important meetings focusing on the linkages between nature and the economy. The Project for Ecosystem Services (ProEcoServ), funded by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Environment Facility (GEF), will hold its first Global Steering Committee meeting in Port of Spain on 21 and 22 May 2012. This will be followed by a meeting of local and international experts on 23 and 24 May 2012 to discuss the challenges of and approaches to mainstreaming ecosystem services into development policy making.

ProEcoServ is a global project that focuses on finding ways to put value on nature's contribution to human well-being and allowing planners to factor this into their decision-making. This four-year initiative (2011-2014) is being implemented in Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Vietnam, and South Africa and Lesotho. The Trinidad and Tobago component was formally launched in February of this year and is being led by University of the West Indies (UWI) through the Department of Life Sciences at the St. Augustine Campus, with technical support from The Cropper Foundation. Research activities are being implemented in the Nariva Swamp and the eastern Northern Range in Trinidad, and the Buccoo

Reef area in Tobago. The Global Steering Committee and international workshop are hosted locally by UWI and The Cropper Foundation in partnership with the Ministry of Planning and the Economy.

According to Pro Vice Chancellor and UWI St. Augustine Campus Principal, Professor Clement K. Sankat, "It is appropriate and extremely timely for Trinidad and Tobago to host these meetings in light of initiatives currently underway to update our National Physical Development Plan (NPDP), strengthen the policy and legislative frameworks in support of biodiversity management, and encourage mainstreaming of ecosystem services into development planning."

The Minister of Planning and the Economy, Senator Dr. The Hon. Bhoendradatt Tewarie has given his Ministry's commitment to integrating ProEcoServ's research and findings into the next National Physical Development Plan. "The project will assist in introducing biodiversity and ecosystem services valuation to Trinidad and Tobago; any plan for further development will take into consideration the results of ProEcoServ, along a path which maximises human and economic development while minimising the negative impacts on the environment," the Minister said. These upcoming meetings of experts are an opportunity to showcase ProEcoServ's work in the area of integrating ecosystems services into land use planning and economic diversification and to learn from the experiences of the other pilot countries.

It is not just Trinidad and Tobago that will benefit from the meetings. "This workshop will provide a unique opportunity for the conservation managers and development practitioners in the regions to learn from other countries and their experiences on mainstreaming," said Dr. Pushpam Kumar, Chief of Ecosystem Services Economics of the UNEP, under whose leadership this project is being implemented. "The country teams will also have the opportunity to design strategy with the help of world class experts who will be participating in the workshop," he added.

The Trinidad and Tobago component of ProEcoServ will also generate useful information for the Caribbean region. Going into next month's Rio+20 negotiations, CARICOM member states are focused on how a green economy can foster regional development and a better quality of life for its peoples. The green economy is one of the two official themes of the Rio+20 Conference. The concept looks at the intersection between the environment and the economy and advocates for economic decisions to be tied to ecosystems. By focusing on the concept of a green economy, the UN is trying to get away from using GDP as a measure of progress and is looking instead at how living standards can be improved equitably without eroding environmental assets.

“The Trinidad and Tobago component of ProEcoServ is working towards developing a system of environmental accounting that would allow us to include nature and its services in our national accounts,” President of The Cropper Foundation, Ms. Keisha Garcia, said. “Once Rio+20 is over and we start implementing its outcomes, our project will go a long way in providing our sister CARICOM countries with practical lessons on what a green economy could mean in our regional context,” she added.

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News Pegs: International Day for Biological Diversity 22 May 2012; Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development 20 - 22 June 2012

Note to the Media: The *ProEcoServ Global Steering Committee Meeting* and the *International Workshop on Mainstreaming Ecosystem Services into Development Policy* will take place at The Conference Centre, Level 18, Tower C, International Waterfront Complex, 1A Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain.

Representatives of the media are invited to cover:

- The opening session of the Global Steering Committee Meeting on Monday, 21 May between 9.00 and 10.00 a.m.
- The opening session of the International Workshop on Mainstreaming Ecosystem Services into Development Policy: Approaches and Opportunities on Wednesday, 23 May between 8.45 and 9.30 a.m.
- The opening session of the cocktail reception on Wednesday 23rd May 2012 from 7:30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

For more information or to schedule an interview, contact:

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