



ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

Tel: (758) 455-6327
Fax: (758) 453-1628
Email: oesec@oeecs.org

THE SECRETARIAT

Morne Fortuné
P O Box 179
Castries, St Lucia, W.I.

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SOUTHERN COMMUNITIES IN SAINT LUCIA TO BENEFIT FROM NEW JOB OPPORTUNITIES

(OECS Secretariat, Castries, St Lucia) A number of community persons are expected to benefit from a new livelihoods project to be launched by the OECS Secretariat in the southern town of Vieux Fort, Saint Lucia next Wednesday, May 19th. The project will be launched at 10:00 a.m. at the Sandy Beach, an area of seaside, which forms part of a large protected area, called the Point Sable Environmental Protection Area (PSEPA).

The ceremony to launch the project will be hosted by the Saint Lucia National Trust in collaboration with the OECS Secretariat and will attract an estimated 50 persons representing various government agencies, the tourism sector, community organisations, local and international environmental agencies, and other private sector representatives.

A number of key persons are down to address the ceremony, which will also see the signing of an agreement between the parties responsible for implementing the project at the community level.

The community livelihoods project is part of a suite of activities under the OECS Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods (OPAAL) Project which has in addition, supported Member States in strengthening their institutional arrangements; attractions related to protected area management and conservation measures.

Mr David Popo, Programme Officer at the OECS Secretariat with responsibility for the community livelihoods project, points out that "recognizing the high levels of unemployment, this project will contribute to strengthening the market skills of persons who operate in and around the protected area to become more competitive in the labour market." He emphasized that "the project is unique in that it provides grant funds to assist local entrepreneurs in purchasing equipment and materials to improve the quality of their products and services." Community persons should therefore seize the opportunity to access the training and monies that the project will provide", Popo added.

Following the May 19th launch, the OPAAL project team from the OECS Secretariat will conduct a two day workshop for persons who will be involved in implementing the community project. The workshop will deliver skills in partnership building, procurement, community mobilization and other pertinent management areas.

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The community sustainable livelihoods initiative is being implemented under the OECS Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods (OPAAL) project and is the **fifth** such project to be launched by OPAAL. The first four livelihoods projects were launched in Union Island, St Vincent in March 2008, Portsmouth, Dominica in June 2009, Antigua in October 2009, and Grenada in March 2010.

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Media Contact: Tecla Fontenard ffontenard@oecs.org (758) 455-6366
Subject Contacts: David Popo dpopo@oecs.org (758) 455-6370