PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

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WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

SPECIAL PUBLICATION

RANGELANDS: RECOGNIZE. RESPECT. RESTORE.

WELCOME

Welcome to this special publication commemorating the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought 2026. As we commemorate World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought on 17 June 2026, under the theme “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.”, we are reminded of the vital importance of healthy and productive landscapes in sustaining livelihoods, supporting biodiversity, strengthening climate resilience, and securing a sustainable future for generations to come.

Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM), is pleased to present this collection of stories, experiences, and achievements that showcase the remarkable efforts being undertaken across Caribbean Small Island Developing States (CSIDS) to protect, restore, and sustainably manage our land resources.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all contributors and partners whose work and experiences have made this publication possible. May these stories inspire continued collaboration, innovation, and commitment toward achieving Land Degradation Neutrality and securing a sustainable future for the Caribbean region

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DR. RONEN C.A FRANCIS

Distinguished partners, colleagues, members of our farming communities, ladies and gentlemen. Our land is speaking. The question is whether we are listening. Across our region, farmers are watching rains that once camereliably now arrive late — or not at all. Soils that fed generations are thinning. Rivers that gave communities life are narrowing. This is not a distant warning. This is the daily reality of our people — and it demands our urgent, collective response.

Today, on World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, we unite under the global theme: ***Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.*** While rangelands may not dominate the landscape of every Caribbean island, this theme speaks directly to us — because from the Rupununi and Sipaliwini savannas of Guyana and Suriname, to the Yalbac and coastal savannas of Belize, our region holds vast living ecosystems that sustain livelihoods, anchor biodiversity, and regulate the water and carbon cycles we all depend upon.

Today, on World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, we unite under the global theme: Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore. Globally, rangelands cover more than half of the Earth's terrestrial surface.They feed hundreds of millions of people, store enormous reserves of carbon, and regulate water across continents.

Rangelands are not empty spaces. They are not marginal land. They are the living skin of our earth — and when we wound them, we wound ourselves. - Dr. Ronen Francis

Changing rainfall patterns, declining soil fertility, accelerating erosion, and falling agricultural yields are threatening the food and water security of our communities today - and the inheritance of our children tomorrow.
This is why today is not merely an observance. It is a call to conscience. A call to every leader, every policymaker, every farmer, and every citizen to treat our land not as a resource to be extracted - but as a living partner to be protected.

To **Recognize** means acknowledging the full value of our rangelands and soils - not only their economic worth, but their cultural, ecological, and spiritual significance to the communities who have stewarded them for generations.

To **Respect** means honoring the people -our farmers, our land managers, our indigenous communities -who work this land every day. Their knowledge is not anecdotal; it is irreplaceable. Their voices must be at the center of every policy decision we make.

To **Restore** means taking decisive, sustained action to heal degraded lands. It means implementing sustainable land and soil management practices that give back more than we take — so that future generations inherit ecosystems capable of feeding them, sheltering them, and protecting them from a changing climate.

Sir Arthur Lewis Community College- St. Lucia- site focused on training, research, and development. the land degradation challenges in this area were related to biodiversity decline, reduction in land cover, and declining water availability.

In our region, this work is already underway. Through the Caribbean SIDS SOILCARE Programme -funded by the Global Environment Facility and implemented with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization - we are promoting sustainable land management, land degradation neutrality, and the restoration of degraded lands across 14 countries. This is not a project on paper. ***It is real action, on real ground, for real communities.***

“The land does not belong only to those alive today. We hold it in trust - for those who came before us, and for those who will come after.”

We are grateful to every minister, focal point, funding partner, and implementing organization who has made this possible. As we also look ahead to COP17 - to be held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in August 2026 - I urge our Caribbean policymakers and national focal points to carry our stories to the world stage. Tell the story of our farmers. Tell the story of our soils. Advocate with conviction for land degradation in SIDS to be placed where it belongs: at the very center of our global climate resilience agenda.

Colleagues, the responsibility is shared — but it begins with each of us. Recognize the value of what we have. Respect those who protect it. And restore, with urgency and with purpose, what has been lost. Our land is still speaking. Let us prove, today and every day, that we are listening.

Saluting our UNCCD Focal Points- who carry our stories to the World Stage at every International Event. In Photo Representatives from Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, State. Lucia, Guyana, Grenada and St. Kitts and Nevis.

CARIBBEAN'S JOURNEY TO SLM : MORE THAN POLICY

SUBMISSION BY MR. TREVOR THOMPSON- PROJECT MANAGER FOR THE CSIDS SOILCARE PROJECT

On a warm morning in Grenada, a farmer bends to scoop a handful of rich, dark soil. To him, it is more than earth—it is survival, heritage, and hope. Across the Caribbean, stories like his are unfolding as island nations rally around sustainable land management (SLM), transforming not only landscapes but lives.

At the heart of this transformation is the Caribbean Small Island Developing States (CSIDs), Multicountry Soil Management Initiative for Integrated Landscape Restoration and Climate-Resilient Food Systems (SOILCARE Project), a regional initiative uniting Caribbean islands under a shared vision: healthier soils, stronger communities, and resilience against climate change.

THE PROGRESS IS TANGIBLE, AND EACH MILESTONE CARRIES A HUMAN DIMENSION:

NATIONAL SOIL SURVEYS	• First survey of its kind in 60 years • Analyzed 20+ chemical parameters • Assessed water quality and environmental conditions • Provided baseline data for future monitoring • Identified key trends and potential concerns
CARIBBEAN SOILS INFORMATION SYSTEM:	• Each island will have its own portal to access soil data. • For farmers, this means knowledge at their fingertips—knowledge that can shape livelihoods. They are able to query the productive elements of the soils they cultivate.
LABORATORY UPGRADES:	• Eight country labs have risen to Tier 1 and Tier 2 capacity.

Handover of Soil Testing Equipment Grenada

Officer with Soil Testing Equipment (St.Lucia)

Handover of Soil Testing Equipment Belize

Regional Technicians Participate in Laboratory Technicians Training at UWI

Soil Testing done training done with Farmers

Caribbean agriculture is shifting from traditional practices to a new focus on soil health and climate-smart management. Farmers are learning to see the link between soil, water, and climate—and to adapt to challenges like droughts, floods, and shifting weather patterns. This isn't just science; it's resilience in action.

BUILDING HUMAN CAPACITY

- Five scholarships have nurtured the next generation of soil scientists. They are in the process of completing their studies at the University of the West Indies.

Scholarship Recipients- Mr.Damian Adjodah, Mr. Darron Williams, Mr.Omali Dare, Mr. Calvin James, Hon. Vaughn Miller, Hon.Cozier Frederick, Ms. Danielle Hanek, Ms. Michelle Alvarez, Mrs.Michelle Wilson-Howard

Building Capacity of Farmers

- At the grass roots level, over 800 farmers and staff have been trained in soil sampling, analysis, and climate-smart tools.

Extension Officers Training Belize *Extension Officers Training Grenada* *CSAC Training St. Lucia*

A Global Voice from Small Islands

For the first time, Caribbean soil technicians and scientists are contributing meaningfully to the global agenda. Their data on soil organic carbon helps shape international discussions on climate and food security. Small Island Developing States (SIDS), often seen as vulnerable, are now recognized as contributors to global solutions.

Soil Organic Carbon Training- with Regional Technicians

"Our soil is our survival; protecting it means protecting our right to food, water, our lands, one handful of soil at a time. - Trevor Thompson

FROM THE GROUND UP: HOW THE BIOREACH LEAD FARMER TRAINING PROGRAMME IS HEALING TRINIDAD'S LAND AND TRANSFORMING LIVELIHOODS

A BIOREACH PROJECT CASE STUDY | SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT IN ACTION

SUBMISSION BY THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING, ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND DEVELOPMENT TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Participants of the BIOREACH Lead Farmer Training Programme, Felicity, Chaguanas — "Learning by Doing." | Photo: Asif Khan

Across Trinidad and Tobago's agricultural landscapes, a quiet revolution is taking root. The BIOREACH Lead Farmer Training Programme is equipping a new generation of farmers and extension officers with the knowledge and confidence to champion agroecology in their own communities, and in doing so, advancing the nation's commitment to Land Degradation Neutrality.

THE CHALLENGE

Trinidad and Tobago loses ground, literally, every dry season. Between 2001 and 2023, the country lost 24,300 hectares of tree cover (Global Forest Watch, 2024), while over 1,000 bushfires were recorded in the first two months of 2024 alone. At the farm level, heavy dependence on synthetic inputs has driven cycles of pest resistance and soil depletion, and the national food import bill reached TT$7.2 billion in 2023, its highest ever. The urgency for a different approach has never been greater.

THE RESPONSE

The BIOREACH Project (GEF-funded, USD 3.752 million grant) targets 1,500 hectares of land restoration and over 5,500 direct beneficiaries across Trinidad and Tobago. Its Lead Farmer Training Programme deploys the FAO-proven Farmer Field School (FFS) methodology, training certified Lead Farmers to mentor peers in their counties and creating a multiplier effect designed to outlast the project itself.

Demonstration plots at the Camden, Couva Learning Field. | Photo: Asif Khan

RESULTS: PROOF IN THE FIELD

The first cohort concluded in November 2025. A celebrated outcome was the unprecedented collaboration between farmers and extension officers throughout the programme, bridging long-standing gaps between these two groups. Women graduates challenged longstanding perceptions about agricultural leadership, while young participants emerged as the next generation of agroecological champions.

18	29	5
Trainers of Trainers graduated, including extension officers from the Ministry of Agriculture and NAMDEVCO.	Farmers graduated from the first Farmer Field School at Felicity, Chaguanas.	Priority green value chains addressed: cocoa, coconut, avocado, pineapple, and roots and tubers.

A side-by-side field trial told the clearest story. Though the conventional plot produced 11 per cent more volume, the agroecological plot delivered a higher net profit — lower input costs, healthier soils, and no chemical residues. Sustainable farming, it turns out, is also smarter farming.

Table 2: Agroecological vs. Conventional Plot — Comparative Field Trial Results (Felicity, Chaguanas)

Metric	Agroecological Plot (A)	Conventional Plot (B)
Total Yield	375 kg	416 kg
Input Cost	Lower (AESA-guided)	Higher (synthetic calendar)
Net Profit	Higher	Lower
Pest Control	Ecological balance via beneficial insects	Rapid re-infestation after suppression
Health and Safety	No chemical residues; soil and water protected	Higher occupational exposure risk

SECURING OUR F.A.T.E. : EXPANDING HEADSPACE TO COMBAT LAND DEGRADATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

SUBMISSION BY MR. STEVE MAXIMAY

As we observe World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought on June 17, 2026, the Caribbean finds itself at a critical juncture. For us, agriculture is never just about farming; it dictates the F.A.T.E. of our region, our Food, Agriculture, Tourism, and Environment. The very survival of these intertwined sectors depends on the health of our soils and our ability to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).

In Small Island Developing States (SIDS), we face a stark geographic reality: our physical land space is strictly limited. We cannot simply move farming operations to new frontiers when existing lands degrade. Therefore, I have long championed the maxim that "when physical land space is limited, headspace must be expanded". To combat desertification and secure our future, we must utilize a "Triple Carriageway" approach that seamlessly blends Creativity, Science, and Intellectual Property.

Through the Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM) and the multi-country SOILCARE Phase 1 project, we are actively shifting from global climate dialogue to tangible, on-the-ground impact across the Caribbean. However, as I frequently remind Extension Officers and policymakers alike, "information does not solve problems; informed people do". Providing a farmer with a pamphlet on soil erosion is insufficient; we must bridge the gap between abstract technical expertise and practical, farm-level wisdom. To facilitate this, we integrated the trademarked Climate-Smart Agriculture Compliant (C-SAC) tool into our SLM initiatives.

C-SAC provides a rigorous, 20-question auditing mechanism that forces practitioners to evaluate their operations across five pillars: resource conservation (including soil and water management), energy use, safety, biodiversity support, and greenhouse gas reduction. By establishing a replicable, science-based standard, we eliminate "greenwashing" and provide farmers with a clear checklist to transition their plots into climate-resilient model farms.

Ultimately, combating land degradation is a profound human-interest story. The wellbeing of our rural stakeholders is intrinsically tied to the earth beneath their feet. We must recognize the "One Health" continuum: the undeniable parallels between a healthy, thriving soil microbiome and a healthy human gut microbiome. Protecting our soils from degradation and chemical contamination is a frontline defense against non-communicable diseases and a vital step toward true nutrition security.

Yet, we cannot expect smallholder farmers to bear the cost of ecosystem restoration alone. As the region navigates climate adaptation, we hear constant calls for a "Just Transition." We must insist that "just" is used as an adjective demanding true social justice and equity, not a dismissive adverb like "just transition already".

To ensure this transition is truly just, I have advocated for the implementation of a "Climate Premium". This financial mechanism ensures that farmers who successfully adopt C-SAC standards and SLM practices receive a direct financial top-up funded by international climate justice and loss-and-damage funds, rather than passing the cost onto local consumers.

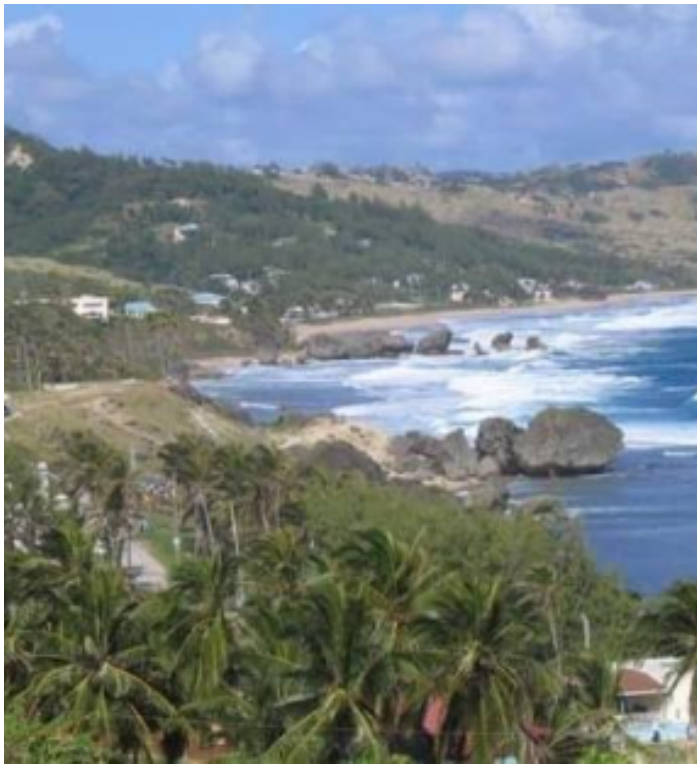
By expanding our headspace, monetizing our intellectual property, and demanding climate finance integrity, we can reward the farmers who are actively preserving our watersheds and soils. Let this year's World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought serve as a reminder: Caribbean farmers are not the victims of the climate crisis, but the sleeping vanguard of its most innovative solutions.

FROM SOIL TO SUSTAINABILITY: RESTORING BARBADOS' FRAGILE LANDSCAPES

SUBMISSION BY THE NATURAL HERITAGE DEPARTMENT
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, NATIONAL BEAUTIFICATION AND FISHERIES

In Barbados, conversations about climate resilience often focus on coastlines, hurricanes, water scarcity, and food security. Yet beneath these pressing concerns lies a resource that quietly sustains all four: soil. As the foundation of agriculture, ecosystem function, water regulation, and landscape stability, healthy soils are central to the future of Caribbean Small Island Developing States. In Barbados' Scotland District, a landscape known for its fragile geology, steep slopes, and recurring land instability, efforts are underway to demonstrate what sustainable land management can look like in practice.

Through the Caribbean Small Island Developing States Multicountry Soil Management Initiative for Integrated Landscape Restoration and Sustainable Food Systems (C-SIDS SOILCARE), implemented with support from the Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Security, the Natural Heritage Department (NHD) is contributing to a growing regional movement towards improved soil stewardship and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).



The Scotland District, Barbados - Photo Natural Heritage Department

The Scotland District presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Unlike much of coral limestone Barbados, this eastern region is geologically distinct, characterised by highly weathered sedimentary formations, rolling terrain, and soils vulnerable to erosion and degradation. Climate variability, unsustainable land practices, and shifting agricultural pressures continue to strain these already sensitive landscapes.

By generating baseline soil data on parameters such as soil fertility, organic matter, texture, pH, and nutrient status, the Project is helping to build a clearer picture of land condition and land capability in an area where scientific data gaps have historically limited planning and intervention.

However, the value of soil science extends beyond laboratory analysis and technical reports. Its true significance emerges in the experiences of those who work the land. At Misty Woods Farms, St. Andrew farming is not an abstract exercise in sustainability; it is a daily negotiation with terrain, rainfall, and soil behaviour. The farmer often intuitively understands that soil health influences everything from crop productivity to drainage and erosion risk. Through engagement with the SOILCARE Project Phase I, discussions about soil testing, nutrient balance, and sustainable soil practices are increasingly linked to tangible decisions on the ground. Knowing what lies beneath the surface allows farmers to move beyond guesswork and towards management choices informed by evidence.

Similar conversations are unfolding at Mystic Valley, St. Andrew, and Codrington College Farm, St. John, where the relationship between land condition and agricultural viability is increasingly evident. Stakeholders have expressed interest not only in productivity but also in the long-term health of the landscape itself. This reflects an important shift in thinking: sustainable land management is no longer viewed solely as an environmental obligation but as an investment in operational resilience, economic stability, and intergenerational stewardship.

The work underway in Barbados shows how progress towards LDN can begin with better information, stronger partnerships, and locally relevant action. Soil assessments, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge-sharing activities have helped create the conditions for more adaptive land-use planning and restoration-oriented decision-making. Importantly, these efforts have strengthened the bridge between scientific expertise and public understanding. Looking ahead, soil management will play an increasingly important role in addressing some of Barbados' most urgent development challenges.

Mystic Valley farmer installing raised beds after project recommendations.

For instance, healthy soils support food security by sustaining agricultural productivity. They improve water infiltration and retention, helping landscapes cope with drought and intense rainfall. They also reduce susceptibility to erosion and land degradation in vulnerable terrains such as the Scotland District.

Misty Wood's farmer showing carrot yield after soil rehabilitative methods.

Overall, the SOILCARE Project Phase I has proven to farmers in the Scotland District that restoring land begins with understanding it, and understanding land begins with the soil beneath our feet.

The story unfolding in the Scotland District is not one of instant transformation. Sustainable land management is inherently long-term work, shaped by science, community engagement, institutional commitment, and the realities of everyday land use. Yet it is precisely this gradual, collaborative process that defines meaningful progress towards Land Degradation Neutrality.

For policymakers in Barbados, this underscores the need to integrate soil considerations more fully into national development planning, climate adaptation strategies, and agricultural policy frameworks. For researchers and academics, it highlights the importance of expanding locally grounded data and interdisciplinary approaches to landscape restoration. For the media and the public, it offers an opportunity to reframe soil not as an invisible background element but as a strategic national asset.

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