



ST. KITTS AND NEVIS:

COUNTRY REPORT TO THE FAO INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL CONFERENCE ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

(Leipzig, 1996)

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Basseterre, June 1995





Note by FAO

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis consists of two small Eastern Caribbean islands with a total land area of 269 square kilometers. The more northerly, St. Kitts, is located between 17 degrees 13' and 17 degrees 25' N and the more southerly, Nevis, between 17 degrees 10' and 17 degree 15' N. Both are situated between 62 and 63 degrees N. The climate is tropical and markedly maritime with small regional variations in temperature. Seasonal and diurnal variations are also small.

Of the elements of climatology, rainfall is the most important since it is normally the limiting factor of the environment for agriculture. The annual rainfall is 1,383 mm compared with the annual open pan evaporation of 2,050 mm. The relative humidity is usually quite low in the dry season although even then it rarely falls below 50%. Saturation is frequently achieved in the wet season and in the early morning during most of the year. The mean value in the middle of the day is about 76%. The prevailing wind is the north easterly trade wind with a velocity of 16 to 20 km/ha. During the hurricane season, July to September, winds blow from the south-east with velocities of 35 to 50 km/hr.

The country is a former British colony with an estimated population of 46,000 of whom about 9,000 live on Nevis. Population growth has been as low as 1.3% per annum due mainly to strong emigration.

Both St. Kitts and Nevis are volcanic islands separated from each other by a strait about 5 km wide. Predominant features of the topography of both islands are peaks rising to about 1,000 m in the central part and which slope down towards narrow coastal plains.

The agricultural sector's percentage contribution to the GDP has been declining in recent years. However, this sector represents a key area of economic activity in the country. The GDP decreased from 16.7% in 1981 to 6.85% in 1990 but increase to 7.44% in 1991. Non-sugar agriculture's contribution to real GDP was 4.0% in 1991 compared to 4.2% in 1989 and 4.0% in 1990. Sugarcane contributed 2.8% and 3.5% to real GDP in 1990 and 1991 respectively.

The agricultural sector is dominated by the sugar industry which occupies 4,000 ha on St. Kitts. No sugarcane is cultivated in Nevis. The sugar industry is managed by a State Corporation. The non-sugar agricultural sector consists



mainly of part-time farmers operating an small holdings of less than 1.0 ha. The farmers cultivate mainly root and tuber crops along with vegetables under rainfed production systems. In general, fruit trees are relatively scarce but mangoes, breadfruit and coconuts are fairly abundant.



CHAPTER 2

Indigenous Plant Genetic Resources

The natural vegetation of the islands is very limited in area. In St. Kitts, the upper lands are well wooded as they have been included in the Forest Reserve since early this century. Hurricanes have had a limiting effect on the growth of trees and strong winds limit the growth of the more useful tree species to below 500 m. Five forest communities have been described for St. Kitts and Nevis:

- The Rain Forest is dominated by the Cabbage palm (*Euterpe globosa*), with large trees of "Gumlin" (*Dacryodes excelsa*) and "Burrwood" (*Solanea* Spp.).
- Dry Evergreen Forest occupies the lower margins of the forest. This group includes the useful "Sweetwood" (*Lauraceae* Spp.) and "Small-leaf" (*Myrtaceae* Spp.) families.
- Palm Brake covering land above an elevation of 400 and 600 m. The forest consists mainly of the mountain cabbage palm with a few tree ferns and small trees.
- Elfin Woodland appearing on peaks and ridges above 600 m.
- Dry Scrub Woodland of the south-east St. Kitts peninsula.



CHAPTER 3

National Conservation Activities

The major Federal legislative regulation in St. Kitts and Nevis is “The National Conservation and Environmental Protection Act 1987” (NCEPA). The Act provides for the establishment of protected areas of different categories viz. national parks, nature reserves, botanical gardens, marine reserves, historic sites, scenic sites and areas of special concern. One purpose of the Act is the preservation of virological diversity of wild fauna and flora species that may be endermic, threatened or of special concern.

There are no programmes or projects for on site conservation of plant genetic resources. There is also no national plant genetic resource collection. However, the forest areas form part of the natural reserves and protected areas.



CHAPTER 4

In-Country Uses of Plant Genetic Resources

There is no systematic use of plant material for crop improvement from the genetic resources. There is no national plant breeding programme and any selection of improved germplasm would have been done by farmers.



CHAPTER 5

National Goals, Policies, Programmes and Legislation

The plant genetic resources activities are not organised into a National Programme except through the conservation of the forest resources by legislation. The legislation covers conservation but not use of the plant genetic resources. The national goal is the protection of the rain forest to ensure sustainable agricultural development. The conservation programme is not adequately staffed and is in need of trained personnel.

The import or export of plant genetic resources are affected by plant quarantine laws. The restriction is based primarily on the movement of plant pests and diseases. The laws however, do allow for the international transfer of *in vitro* materials and seeds. Normally, there is no significant delay in the passage of genetic resource material through quarantine. The National laws do not restrict the planting out of imported genetic material.

There is no comprehensive legislation on intellectual property rights. Assistance is needed on legal matters concerning plant genetic resources. At present, the only policy on the exchange of plant genetic resources relates to quarantine restrictions.

Government provides incentives on the provision of agricultural inputs mainly through the exemption of import duties. Credits are sometimes provided for the purchase of selective plant material.



CHAPTER 6

International Collaboration

The country has been involved in a recent Tropical Forestry Action Programme. The programme developed strategies for the long term development of the forestry sector. The implementation of the comprehensive programme is now awaiting financing.

The country does not have any special relationship with any of the regional research centres that have significant plant genetic resources programmes. There is no organised national plant genetic resources programme and the country does not have any bilateral agreement on plant genetic resources with any other country.



CHAPTER 7

National Needs and Opportunities

- Identification of indigenous flora and fauna.
- Identification of wild progenitors of current or potentially important commercial agricultural forestry, pastoral or medicinal plants.
- Determination of any genetic diversity of economic or social important plants which may be present in the wild.
- Identification of any species in the wild that might be important indigenous sources of plant products.
- Training in plant genetic resources including taxonomy, programme management, data management, germplasm health, seed science and agronomic evaluation.
- Development of Intellectual Property Rights legislation.