ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES:

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

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Note by FAO

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The Country

St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) is one of those small island states. It is located in the Eastern Caribbean approximately 13N 61°W. It is part of the West Indian archipelago which stretches from Florida in the North to Venezuela in the South. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is part of the regional sub-grouping known as the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). This multi-island nation consists of the larger island, St. Vincent and several small islands and cays known collectively as the Grenadines. The largest of these being Bequia, Union Island, Canouan, Mustique and Mayreau. Together the islands have an approximate surface area of 150 sq miles.

Relief

Structurally, the islands are part of the inner volcanic arc and are geologically the tops of a submarine ridge. The islands have a rugged terrain with very little flat land. The island of St. Vincent has a central wooded highland which is dominated by the active volcano (4,000 ft. above sea level) La Soufriere in the north. A number of spurs and valleys radiate from this central mountainous interior on either side of the island.

Climate

The islands experience a Tropical Marine Climate with relatively mild, stable temperatures. The day temperature seldom rises beyond 85°F/29° C and night temperature would be about 76°F/24° C. The pervading influence of the sea moderates these temperatures as the North-East Trade winds blow across the Atlantic and onto these islands. The average annual rainfall of over 150" in the interior and 60" along the Western rain shadow coast is distributed over a pronounced dry season from June to November and a dry season from December to May.

Soils

The weathering of the volcanic rocks and the deposits of debris from volcanic eruptions have left St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) with a legacy of rather deep, fertile soils for the most part.

The combination of the size, relief, climate and edaphic factors have left us resources which are very limited but nonetheless extremely precious to us as a people. The natural vegetation or plant genetic resources and our agricultural systems have been influenced by these factors. The natural vegetation consists of species typical of tropical rainforest in the central mountains and wooded valleys. The coastal drier areas contain species reminiscent of scrub land. Some of the dominant forest species include Fiddle wood citharexylum foeteidissum, white cedar, tabebuia pallida.

Population

The 1991 national census put our population at 107,639 equally distributed between the sexes (53,885 males, 53,754 females). With a population density of 700 per sq mile St. Vincent and the Grenadines is still regarded as one of the most densely populated islands. The demographic information shows that the population is still very rural 14.5% live in Kingstown the capital. The population is also rather youthful 66.7% under age 30 yrs. and 29.5% between 15 and 29 years of age.

Economy

Agriculture is still the major contributor to the economy responsible for about 9% of GDP. However tourism, light manufacturing and services have been increasing their share annually. Farms are generally small <5 acres and most farmers follow a mixed farming system in which bananas predominate. The country has an annual export quota of 82,000 tons to be exported to Europe, particularly the U.K., under a preferential marketing arrangement. A variety of root crops including arrowroot, sweet potatoes, aroids, yams, ginger and cassava are cultivated for domestic use and export. Under the government's land reform and agricultural diversification programme attention is being paid to fruits and vegetables both for domestic consumption and export.

Forestry

Approximately 39% of mainland St. Vincent is forested. The retention of this forest cover is primarily as environmental preservation and not from an

economic utilization point of view. From a recently concluded CIDA/GOSVG Forestry Project the final report states that the forests serve the following purposes:

- The plantation forests (450 acres) provide timber for the national furniture industry.
- The rivers and streams which have been harnessed provide potable water and some electricity.
- Some people still depend on the forest for fuel wood and charcoal.
- Increasingly, nationals as well as visitors have been using the forests for recreation.
- The limited wildlife in St. Vincent and the Grenadines have the forests as their habitat. This includes one/two bird species regarded as endemic to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. e.g. the St. Vincent parrot, Amazona guildingii and the whistling warbler Catharopeza bishopi.

CHAPTER 2
Indigenous Plant Genetic Resources

Very little is known about the indigenous plant genetic resources of this country except for a National Forest Inventory which was completed in 1992.

CHAPTER 3
National Conservation Activities

In situ Plant Genetic conservation began in St. Vincent and the Grenadines over 200 years ago when the oldest Botanic Gardens in the Western Hemisphere was established on 20 acres of land on the outskirts of Port Kingstown, the capital.

Since then the area has served as the major site for the collection and introduction of over 300 plant species and cultivars. These include fruit trees spices, ornamentals and medicinal plants. Since then several other areas have been designated reserves including the historic Kingshill Forest reserve some 6 miles from Kingstown on the eastern side of the island. Currently there are eight Agricultural Stations where some form of plant genetic conservation is maintained. Primarily these centers have collections of fruit trees, root crops, ornamentals and forage plants.

CHAPTER 4
In-Country Uses of Plant Genetic Resources

There is no plant breeding programme hence the major use to which these genetic resources are put is distribution to farmers.

CHAPTER 5
National Goals, Policies, Programmes and Legislation

The national policies and goals have really been a reflection of the times. The main objective behind genetic conservation was primarily to introduce cultivars/species which showed some genetic advantage; and the concept was to get farmers to cultivate these varieties. Also as stated before, forest conservation was seen mainly as preventing environmental degradation. Therefore, whatever legislations which exist e.g. Forest Resources Conservation Act of 1992 mirror that policy. Reforestation programmes and tree crops development programmes had the same underguiding principle. Perhaps with this increasing awareness on the importance of indigenous genetic resources changes will follow.

CHAPTER 6
National Needs

- Awareness Building. This country needs to know what plant genetic resources are peculiar to it and the relative importance of these resources. The justification for the expenditure of resources on facilities, legislation and programmes can come only as we know what we have and determine if it is worthwhile to conserve what we have.
- Human Resource Development. If this country is provided with expertise to identify our plant genetic resources our nationals should be trained to counterpart these experts thus leaving behind a basis for continued development.
- Facilities. There's a need for materials and supplies for the collection, storage and retrieval of data and the cataloging of specimens as they are identified.
- Legislation. Having identified valuable genetic resources there is need for a national legal framework to protect and control/regulate the exploitation of these resources to the benefit of the country.

CHAPTER 7
Proposals For a Global Plan of Action

- A pool of experts should be identified who could be made available to countries who may wish to have a national inventory of their plant genetic resources, but who do not possess national experts.
- That a programme of training be initiated to strengthen national capabilities in the management of national plant genetic resources.
- That model legislation be drafted which small island states could consider in the development of their own legal framework to protect their indigenous plant genetic resources.
- Consideration be given to the establishment of regional/subregional centers with facilities to store plant genetic resources for members of that region.
- That where *in situ* plant genetic resources now exist in Botanic Gardens or Agricultural Stations, assistance be provided to national governments for their further development.