

# Participating or Just Talking? Sustainable Development Councils and the Implementation of Agenda 21

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## Democracy, Institutions, and Sustainability

Sustainable Development Councils were among the few specific institutional recommendations to come out of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. They have also been among the few concrete, national-level institutional manifestations of the global commitment to sustainable development proclaimed in the two main UNCED documents, the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. As with most post-Rio developments, the results achieved by the Sustainable Development Councils (hereafter SDCs or councils) have been mixed. At their best, the councils represent concerted efforts by states, civil society, and international organizations at a critical juncture of three basic principles laid out at Rio: (1) future development must be economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable; (2) sustainable development requires substantive and institutionalized stakeholder participation;<sup>1</sup> (3) developed countries have a responsibility to support the costs incurred by developing countries in making development sustainable.<sup>2</sup> At their worst they represent the frustrations and unmet challenges of the thirteen years since Rio.

In this paper, we offer case studies of three SDCs in small-island developing states (SIDS) in the Eastern Caribbean: Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Grenada.

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1. Precise theoretical and operational definitions of "sustainability" have been widely debated (see for example Achterberg 1996). We rely on the Brundtland definition because it has achieved the widest currency of any of the contenders and because it is the one that informs major international conferences and conventions, including the Rio Accords and Agenda 21. It defines sustainable development as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).
2. United Nations Environment Programme 2001 and 1994.

Originally, six Eastern Caribbean SDCs were attempted. Only one is currently functioning—the Sustainable Development Council of Grenada. Still, there is much to be gained from subjecting both the successes and the failures to a comparative case study. First, we may be able to explain the variation we find in each country's responses to the relatively vague guidance offered by the Rio documents. Second, we can question why state and civil society reacted differently to fundamentally similar national conditions and resource limitations in three countries. Third, there is still considerable interest and hope, in several Eastern Caribbean SIDS, that some variation of the SDC model will take root. Finally, there is reason to believe that the lessons derived from Eastern Caribbean cases will be of interest in other small developing states.

*The Sustainable Development Councils—in Principle and Practice*

Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration states:

Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level.

At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 8 of Agenda 21 calls for the strengthening of national institutional capacity for the purpose of

Establishing domestically determined ways and means to ensure the coherence of sectoral, economic, social, and environmental policies, plans, and policy instruments, including fiscal measures and the budget; these mechanisms should apply at various levels and bring together those interested in the development process . . .

Governments, in cooperation, where appropriate, with international organizations, should strengthen national institutional capability and capacity to integrate social, economic, developmental, and environmental issues at all levels of development decision-making and implementation. Attention should be given to moving away from narrow sectoral approaches, progressing towards full cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

Guided by these two documents, the Eastern Caribbean councils were established on a standard pattern. During their formation they received a small amount of funding and technical support from the United Nations Develop-

3. United Nations Environment Programme 2000.

4. United Nations Environment Programme 2001.

ment Programme Capacity 21 Project, administered by a partner regional organization. In the Eastern Caribbean the Capacity 21 partner agency was the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD). CARICAD worked through national “focal points” (responsible individuals) who issued invitations to membership and acted as provisional conveners of the councils. Invitations were made with an eye toward balanced representation from government, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs).

Terms of reference for each of the six Eastern Caribbean SDCs established in the mid-1990s stipulate the following functions: an advisory role *vis-à-vis* government policy-making processes, a coordinating role in planning and administration, support to government in pursuing holistic approaches to development policy, broad representation of all interested sectors and organizations, and liaison with international organizations and external funding sources.<sup>5</sup> In practice, which of these functions were given precedence, how each SDC attempted to realize them, and the institutional relationship of each SDC to its respective national government proved critical to the councils’ effectiveness and survivability. But the relationship between a council’s effectiveness and its survival has been neither linear nor direct.

Thus, even our small sample gives us considerable variability as to procedural and structural aspects of Sustainable Development Councils (e.g., leadership, membership, scope of responsibilities, and methods of institutionalization); the formal and informal relationships between such bodies and their national governments and civil societies; and their effectiveness for ensuring the sustainability of development policies and programs.

Ultimately, our purpose is to extract lessons that might lead to the establishment of long-lived and effective councils or similar bodies and to provide practical lessons about the present and future of environmentally sustainable development in highly vulnerable states by pointing out: (1) key political factors in the relationship between participatory democracy and environmental sustainability and (2) the need for and limits to external support for participatory practices in small democratic states.

### *Participation, Institutions, and the Environment: Some Theoretical Considerations*

The theoretical case for ecological democracy is powerfully made from a variety of ideological perspectives. Although much of the relevant literature delves more deeply into democratic theory than is necessary for present purposes, most of it supports a positive relationship between sustainability and participatory policy-making processes. To find essential value in participatory practices one need not go as far as Mills (1996), who labels centralized, technocratic administration of environmental policy “ecoauthoritarian.” It is enough to know

5. Fairclough 1996.

that both liberals and social democrats, regardless of their disagreements about the socio-economic causes of environmental degradation, have supported approaches that emphasize active and substantive consultation of affected and interested communities.<sup>6</sup> The arguments in favor of democratic approaches are supported by studies of developed democracies;<sup>7</sup> transitional polities in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America;<sup>8</sup> and democratic developing countries.<sup>9</sup>

The argument in favor of a special role for environmental movements in democratization is probably clearest in the literature on deliberative democracy. Barry, for example, argues that due to the greater responsiveness of democratic institutions to new issues and demands, and the role played by environmentalists in democratization, there is an undeniably "positive relationship between democratic institutions and ecological protection."<sup>10</sup> Still, there is considerable disagreement over the meaning and means of democratic decision-making, the ways in which environmentalism affects and is affected by liberal democracy, the proper mix of centralization and decentralization for good environmental management, and the right mix of technocracy and "indigenous knowledge."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, even though calls for rethinking institutional arrangements are routinely included in analyses of sustainable development policy-making, there is insufficient theory to guide the selection of particular decision-making processes or institutional arrangements.<sup>12</sup>

There is, of course, an extensive case-study literature on stakeholder participation, but it usually focuses either on the grassroots, treating environmentalism as a type of new social movement,<sup>13</sup> or on the ways that environmentalist parties and interest groups directly affect electoral and legislative politics.<sup>14</sup> There are, however, several studies, including some on the Caribbean, that contain suggestions for institutional reform and innovation.

Deliberative democracy theorists point out the inherent limitations of the electoral and legislative processes of liberal democracy for achieving the kind of full stakeholder identification and engagement recommended by Agenda 21.<sup>15</sup> Parliamentary democracy in the Eastern Caribbean is no exception and the small population size of Eastern Caribbean states presents some particular challenges. Accountability in the Westminster system relies on disciplined parties with broad class and/or ideological constituencies; a large, professionalized, and independent civil service; and civil society organizations that are either institutionally linked to parties or able to influence government and state

6. Christoff 1996, 162.

7. Janicke 1996; and Hayward 1996.

8. Mumme and Korzetz 1997; Desai 1998; and Lee, Hsiao, Liu et al. 1999.

9. Nielson and Stern 1997, 146–151; Silva 1997; and Rosenberg and Korsmo 2001.

10. Barry 1996, 116–7.

11. Cooke and Kothari 2001.

12. Ostrom 1990; Fiorino 1996; and Fischer 2000.

13. Bryner 2001, Chapter 1; Szasz 1999; and Taylor 1995a.

14. For example, Kitschelt 1993.

15. Meadowcroft 2004, 181–187.

decision-makers directly. But Eastern Caribbean parliaments are small and parties tend to be personalistic, limiting the ability of civil society and the business community to shape party manifestos and policy decisions.<sup>16</sup> Small populations also limit the pools of qualified personnel to lead government, state agencies, and NGOs. Leaders may move among government, state agencies, civil society, and the business community as governments and economic opportunities change.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, without institutional innovation it can be difficult to introduce new perspectives and methods of policy-making.

The introduction of environmental sustainability as a consideration in development policy—via Agenda 21—ultimately required compromise, cooperation, and new methods of accountability. Each state has dealt with the challenges differently, and with differing degrees of success. Eastern Caribbean NGOs and quasi-governmental organizations can claim significant accomplishments in developing and applying methods of stakeholder identification and in the creation of innovative natural resource management schemes.<sup>18</sup> In Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Grenada there are examples of stakeholders from government, civil society, and the business community establishing new institutions for cooperation and accountability in defining problems, setting directions and implementing policies and programs for sustainable resource use.<sup>19</sup> However, these states have not yet institutionalized the kind of national level iterative processes envisioned by the advocates of deliberative democracy.<sup>20</sup> For that, Meadowcroft suggests, “meso” level organizations, “where the personnel and structures of the state meet individuals and groups rooted in civil and commercial life,” hold the most promise for spreading substantive deliberative practices “to a specific policy sector such as environmental decision making.” He suggests also that “such practices can enhance societal learning” related to environmental and natural resource policy-making and implementation.<sup>21</sup>

Given their broad, tripartite representative structure, the councils seem to satisfy the requirements of a “meso” level organization through which each participating sector may add to its own capacity and the capacity of the state to make and implement sustainable development policy. International environmental NGOs, international organizations, and bi-lateral and multilateral aid

16. Ryan 2002, 244–246.

17. This is particularly true in Saint Lucia and Dominica. For example, during the time this research was conducted the founding director of the St. Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme left to head a government ministry and Dominica’s Chief Fisheries Officer left government for private business while retaining his seat on the Scott’s Head/Soufriere Marine Reserve Local Area Management Authority. NGO and government officials working in the region speak of GONGOs (Government Organized Nongovernmental Organizations).

18. Renard 2001.

19. Renard, Brown, and Geoghegan 2001; and Bass 2000. See also the web site of the Small Island Developing States Network at <http://www.sidsnet.org/successstories/> for a list of arguably successful cases of “participatory environmental planning” in Caribbean and other small island developing states.

20. Caribbean Natural Resources Institute 2003.

21. Meadowcroft 2004, 188.

agencies have clearly identified the need for that kind of capacity building in their policy and case-history documents, and typically link capacity building to democratization. For example, writing for the World Resources Institute, Zazueta notes that

In strengthening the organizational capacities of NGOs and GROs [grass-roots organizations] in Latin America, three challenges stand out as particularly important: (1) defining their specific roles and developing the corresponding skills to contribute effectively to solving the complex problems that they are being asked to address; (2) obtaining enough long-term financial assistance to be able to focus on strategic planning and implementation of projects; (3) joining forces to open political spaces and to confront common problems with all those involved in attaining sustainable development.<sup>22</sup>

Generalizations abound as to how these goals may be achieved. But particular types of solutions can only be derived from specific cases, most of which seem to have developed through trial and error involving changing relationships among governments, aid agencies, communities, and dedicated individuals. A complete typology would be beyond the scope of this paper, but we can offer a few observations that place the SDCs in a broader context.

In the case-study literature we find two polar types of participatory arrangements. The first is community-based—usually presented as either spontaneous or traditional—in which local groups wishing to remedy particular problems form (or existing groups re-orient themselves) to confront, circumvent or supplement conventional political authority. Organizational structures and methods vary with the larger political context, group membership, resources, and the nature of the problem.<sup>23</sup> The second type is broader-based. Groups with national or regional memberships organize around more comprehensive environmental agendas to affect legislative and electoral outcomes. These groups may operate as political parties or conventional interest groups. As interest groups, their positions and methods run the gamut from those of radical external pressure groups to partners in corporatist or neo-corporatist arrangements convened by governments to assist in policy formulation and implementation.<sup>24</sup>

However, there are many more innovative, resilient, and cooperative arrangements in which organized grassroots actors participate in deliberative processes. First, local NGOs and CBOs are not necessarily spontaneous or traditional. Many have shown great capacity for adapting to new challenges, taking on new functions, and engaging a variety of local, national, and international actors and issues.<sup>25</sup> Second, in the Eastern Caribbean the distinctions between

22. Zazueta 1993, 1–2. See also, for example, Global Environmental Facility 1996; Organization of American States 2001; Anderson 2000; and Inter-American Development Bank 2000.

23. Taylor 1995b; Rigg and Stott 1998; and Lee and So 1999.

24. Bryner 2001, Chapter 2; Lee, Hsiao, Liu, et al. 1999; and Lipschutz and Conca 1993.

25. See, for example, Pinchón, Uquillas, and Frechione 1999; and Langer and Muñoz 2003.

state and civil society are not always clear-cut or historically fixed. For example, Grenada's Agency for Rural Transformation (ART), which began as a state agency under Maurice Bishop's People's Revolutionary Government, was shut down after the US invasion, later to be reconstituted as a nongovernmental umbrella organization for rural CBOs, development, cultural, and conservation projects. ART has supported the formation of rural community and women's groups that have effectively instituted ongoing water conservation and economic development projects and has been active in the Grenada SDC.<sup>26</sup> In Saint Lucia, the National Trust has helped organize several community-managed rural development and conservation projects; the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (a regional NGO discussed further below) has helped create successful local resource management associations; and the Cultural Heritage Tourism Programme has supported the development of community-based tourism projects.<sup>27</sup> In Dominica, the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries Division oversaw the creation of a local management authority for a marine reserve.<sup>28</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, the Sustainable Development Councils are not, strictly speaking, grassroots participatory bodies. Neither are they corporatist or neo-corporatist "elite" or "peak" organizations. They are, instead, a special case of representative body convened to advise government and evolving to take on other roles: assisting government, acting independently or becoming absorbed by state agencies. Members are expected to report to and reflect the interests of their constituencies, even though they are not elected by their organizations specifically to sit on the councils. Organizations are represented on the councils through a mixture of invitation and self-selection, and the membership tends to be drawn mainly from leadership positions in public and private sector organizations. Although the particular mix of membership in an SDC can lend itself to indirect representation of some grassroots groups and interests, other interested sectors of society may be left out. As is typical of elite-level bodies, some of this exclusiveness is the result of selectivity—based on a desire to keep the council to a manageable size and allow for presentations and debate of technical issues at a fairly high intellectual level—and some of it is idiosyncratic, random or political.

### *Responses to Agenda 21: The Barbados Conference*

Most small-island developing states ratified Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration immediately. Perhaps because of the high level of economic and environmental vulnerability to global change, SIDS were leaders in making institutional responses to Agenda 21.

26. See "History" and "Programmes" at <http://www.spiceisle.com/homepages/art/>.<http://www.spiceisle.com/homepages/art/>

27. See "Community Based Tourism" at <http://www.stluciaheritage.com/default.htm>; "Management Areas" at <http://www.slunatrust.org/>; Geohegan and Smith 1998; and Renard 2001.

28. Lawrence, Magliore, and Guiste n.d.

The institutionalization process began to take shape in 1994 when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convened the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in Barbados. The conference produced the Declaration of Barbados and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Programme of Action was developed for the express purpose of implementing Agenda 21 and reflects the intensity of concern among SIDS governments and NGOs about the environmental issues raised at Rio. The Barbados Declaration, in language adopted directly from Agenda 21, emphasizes the need to develop institutional capacity for disaster preparedness, the mitigation and prevention of environmental degradation using methods consistent with the economic interests of SIDS, and the need to pursue external funding. As with Agenda 21, the Barbados Programme calls for action in areas eligible for funding by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a new source of grants established by UNDP, the UN Environment Programme, and the World Bank in 1991 and focused on biodiversity, climate change, international waters, ozone depletion, and land degradation. Consistent with Agenda 21, the Barbados documents link all of these issues with the need for the institutional mainstreaming of new sustainable development policy-making mechanisms that are broad-based, authoritative, and participatory.

Even before the Barbados meeting, most Caribbean SIDS had already considered some kind of sustainable development task force. The Barbados Declaration recognized those efforts by pledging to

Give sustainable development task forces or their equivalent the official authority and validity to permit their continued meeting as interdisciplinary and communally representative advisory bodies.<sup>29</sup>

Immediately following the Barbados conference, the Unit for Environmental Policy Management of UNDP created Capacity 21. The program provided financial support, technical assistance, and training to build institutional capacity in Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Barbados, Jamaica, and the British Virgin Islands. UNDP provided a total of US\$750,000 to the Caribbean Development Bank, the designated facilitating institution. The Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD), a regional intergovernmental organization based in Barbados, was selected as the implementing agency.<sup>30</sup>

UNDP and CARICAD dedicated a substantial portion of the funds to a series of national consultations evaluating local efforts and capacity and promoting the establishment of new, tripartite consultative bodies.<sup>31</sup>

29. United Nations 2000, 51.

30. Unless otherwise indicated, the account of CARICAD's role comes from a personal interview conducted by Dr. Rosenberg with Angela R. Skeete, Regional Programme Coordinator, Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD), Bridgetown, Barbados, 22 February 2002. Ms. Skeete was CARICAD Project Officer for Capacity 21.

31. See for example CARICAD 1995, and 1996. The Dominica consultation was the first of six in the Eastern Caribbean.



A major thrust of the capacity building effort will be the establishment of Sustainable Development Councils or a related mechanism in each of the participating countries. Participation in these consultative bodies will include government agencies, business and commercial associations and community-based organizations. Through the councils, the required administrative and management devices of sustainable development plans and programmes will be strengthened. The responsibility of selecting, analysing and promoting activities and identifying policy issues related to priority areas, through a process of consultation, will be a major undertaking of the project.<sup>32</sup>

Prior to the national consultations CARICAD selected “focal points” in the six participating Caribbean countries. Selections were based on the assumption that the best way to mainstream sustainability was to introduce it directly into the planning process via well-placed officials supported by expert private-sector and NGO input. Therefore, the focal points were mainly from planning ministries or related state or quasi-governmental institutions; they were expected to convene councils that would provide an institutionalized platform for building national consensus on the compatibility of environmental sustainability and economic development.

The national consultations were guided, but broadly representative, participatory processes in which the agenda and expectations of UNDP and CARICAD were modified according to the input received. From the outset, the ultimate aim was to form SDCs. At the end, CARICAD program officers instructed their national focal points to issue invitations to a select steering committee for the purposes of forming a council.

While UNDP and CARICAD clearly encouraged stakeholder participation and faithfully pursued the objectives for participatory policy-making set forth in Agenda 21, their methodology shaped the SDCs in four ways that were to determine their effectiveness and survivability: (1) the requirement that the councils be headed by officials of governmental or quasi-governmental organizations; (2) the guided selection of leadership and membership; (3) the tripartite—government, private sector, and NGO/CBO—representation scheme; and (4) the goal of authoritative input into specific areas of policy-making.

Capacity 21 guidelines required the councils to be permanent bodies bringing together government, NGOs and CBOs, with private sector users, producers, marketers, and consumers of resources, headed by a government official for whom sustainable development was a primary responsibility. Typically, the head of the SDC would also be a member of a governmental sustainable development unit.<sup>33</sup> The councils were to convene regular meetings to review and ad-

32. Caribbean Centre for Development Administration 1995, 2.

33. The Caribbean Development Bank authorized the disbursement of Capacity 21 funds in tranches, at the beginning of each stage of the process determined by UNDP and CARICAD. Therefore, each of the six countries received a limited amount of funds to develop the post of council head, issue invitations and convene the first meeting (personal interview by Rosenberg with A. Skeete).

wise on development policy and programs, and to call government's attention to concerns about the sustainability of ongoing activities and existing programs. Through their relationship with the sustainable development unit, SDCs would be in a position to review all development policy for sustainability and ensure compliance with international agreements and the requirements of external funding agencies. The sustainable development units were to have unique authority to affect decisions made by several ministries. The SDCs were to provide a source of input and local expertise to support the functions of the unit.<sup>34</sup>

To date the SDCs have been, at best, partially successful, while the sustainable development units have yet to fully establish themselves as influential entities within their respective governments. The experiences of Dominica and Saint Lucia are indicative.<sup>35</sup>

### **SDCs in Dominica and Saint Lucia**

The National Sustainable Development Council of Dominica was created by the Government of Dominica in 1995. It numbered thirteen members, the majority being from individual businesses and business associations involved in tourism, manufacturing, construction and services. The SDC was mandated to coordinate all development projects. All projects proposed by the government or submitted to the government from the private sector were supposed to come through the council. In addition, the council was charged with monitoring and ensuring compliance with international environmental treaties and programs (such as Agenda 21, the Montreal Protocol, and conventions on desertification and biodiversity).

From the beginning the Dominica SDC was weak, poorly funded, and suffered from organizational problems. Politically, the council was in a difficult position. To carry out its mandate it would have to act as a virtual "super-ministry" with authority to review and revise any policy with potential environmental impact coming from any other agency. The potential for conflict with senior agency heads and cabinet ministers was great. The council drew up Terms of Reference for dissemination to the government ministries affected by its mandate. They were ignored. Originally, the council was subsidiary to the pre-existing

34. United Nations Environment Programme 2001. This general description of the roles and structure of the SDCs and sustainable development units is consistent with the mandate laid out in Agenda 21. It was confirmed to Rosenberg that the SDCs in Dominica and Saint Lucia were established to conform to Agenda 21 specifications. Interview with Christopher Corbin, Castries, St. Lucia 29 May 1998, 31 May 1999 and 12 February 2002; interview with Gerard Hill, Coordinator Sustainable Development Council, Roseau, Dominica, 21 May 1998; and the author's observation of a meeting of the Grenada Sustainable Development Council, St. George's, Grenada, 18 June 1999, and on three occasions in November and December of 2001 and January of 2002.

35. The following discussion of the Dominica National Sustainable Development Council and Environmental Coordinating Unit is based on the interview with Gerard Hill cited above, and Government of Grenada n.d.

National Development Council in whose building its office was located and from which it drew its coordinator and staff. The National Development Council is a statutory body concerned primarily with manufacturing and tourism. Thus, its jurisdiction overlapped that of the SDC, and its mandate—to promote growth—often contradicted the SDC’s goals of sustainability and broader stakeholder participation.

Relations between the functional ministries of the government and the National Development Council were well established. Neither the National Development Council nor the economic and planning ministries of the government were willing to share responsibility with the SDC, a body headed by a junior administrator with the unenviable task of demanding that his seniors relinquish some of their control over development policy. At best, the SDC was able to review and make recommendations on specific projects directed to it by the National Development Council and the ministries. Otherwise, the SDC coordinator acted mainly as a liaison with representatives of international organizations, greeting them and introducing them to the responsible officials. It also acted as a clearinghouse for the National Development Council and the ministries for communications coming from international organizations and drafted guidelines on compliance with international and regional initiatives.

The challenges to forming a viable SDC in Saint Lucia were similar. After Barbados, the government held meetings on sustainable development and made national environmental plans and surveys. Those efforts were mostly *ad hoc* and informal and did not receive the full blessing of policy-makers. Government did not seek legislative authority for an environmental coordinating unit, and the responsible agencies did not buy into the desirability of having an SDC. Through the 1990s, systematic effort to bring stakeholder participation into the planning process was stymied by a “top-down” institutional culture and competition over administrative jurisdiction. The main body for convening stakeholders involved in planning and development was the Saint Lucia Development Control Authority (DCA), made up of representatives of public and private entities involved in economic development. The DCA, which operated out of the Physical Planning Department, with the Chief Planner acting as its Executive Secretary, controlled much of the physical planning for construction, zoning, and public works and had no tradition of consultation or participation beyond its own membership. Even the DCA has been weakened by the occasional practice of top political officials overriding its decisions to approve projects that both the DCA and stakeholders had rejected or canceling projects that stakeholders and the DCA had approved. Government (public works) projects traditionally did involve some public hearings, but those hearings were rarely substantive consultations.

Funding was also a problem for the SDCs. Capacity 21 funds were quickly exhausted by the initial organizational work, leaving nothing to actually carry out the councils’ sweeping mandate. SDCs became dependent on the limited

amounts of external funding available for specific projects and initiatives. In Dominica, that included a share of a GEF grant given to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) to promote regional land management and Organization of American States (OAS) funds, distributed through the OECS, to promote integrated regional development.

Thus, by the middle of 1998, the SDC coordinator in Dominica was left to hope that the OECS/OAS project and pending grant applications to the GEF could raise the council's profile and provide it with enough funds to eventually carry out its original mandate. But the comprehensive mission of the SDCs put them outside the mandate of the GEF. Even though their interests and responsibilities included all GEF areas, GEF explicitly excludes institution building and projects that integrate multiple areas of concern.

The GEF application was unsuccessful and one year later the Dominica SDC was moribund. However, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment did receive a grant from the GEF, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to expand institutional capacity by forming a new Environmental Coordinating Unit. The GEF grant provided funds for a director, two associates, and a secretary for 18 months. The former coordinator of the SDC became the first associate. As of early 2002 a secretary had been hired and a director and second associate were being sought. The details have yet to be worked out concerning the fate of the SDC and its relationship to the new unit. But the unit's relationship to its new home ministry is potentially clearer than the relationship between the SDC and the National Development Council. The unit has less autonomy and more governmental authority than the SDC and is intended to be a fully empowered division of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment, on par with the Forestry and Fisheries Divisions. It should subsume all duties and responsibilities of the SDC pertaining to ministry programs and actively solicit stakeholder input into all its decisions. It will also act as a clearinghouse for information on GEF grants, which are expected to become an important source of funding for environmentally sustainable development. The establishment of the unit was the result of nearly three years of pressure by the former coordinator of the SDC on the government, which had promised to establish such a unit in its 1995 electoral manifesto.

The Environmental Coordination Unit, when fully operational, should also allow the government to finally draw on funds allocated to it under a variety of international environmental conventions. Any proposal of the Ministry of Agriculture that has an environmental impact will be referred to the unit for review and comment on its sustainability and use of participatory methods. In addition, the SDC still exists on paper and the unit will consider reviving it as an independent advisory body. The former SDC coordinator proposes to reinstate the methods of stakeholder identification and inclusion used by the SDC, which entailed selection of *ad hoc* representatives by the National Association of Non-governmental Associations (NANGO) to join the SDC on a project-specific basis.

At the time of this writing, we cannot accurately assess or predict the success of the new unit or its real contribution to effective stakeholder participation. However, the prospects are not good. The Programme Director of the Dominica Conservation Association, the leading local environmental NGO, questioned the capacity of NANGO to act on behalf of Dominican NGOs in an organized government forum.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, 18 months was insufficient to test the viability of the new approach. Barring the unlikely event that the Environmental Coordinating Unit receives a large budgetary allocation, its survival will depend on its ability to attract support from external development assistance agencies. As of February 2002, when this portion of the research concluded, the Unit existed on paper but seemed to have been rendered ineffective by political gridlock resulting from an unstable parliamentary coalition.

In Saint Lucia, we find impediments to mainstreaming sustainability within and among state agencies and in state/society relations. The more integrative approaches to policy-making required by the SDC model have run up against bureaucratic turf problems, especially as concerns the budgetary process. Environmental considerations get included in development policy only when they coincide with the established priorities of line ministers. Otherwise, they can be seen by ministers as a source of competition for scarce project funds.

Communications between technical personnel and grassroots stakeholders also have proven difficult. Some of the problems are as basic as language barriers and cultural differences. The official language of government is English, while many rural people speak a French-based Creole. The ministries of Fisheries, Forestry, Environmental Health, and Community Development have people placed in communities who speak Creole, but they have had limited success in communicating their ministries' interests in stakeholder input.

In addition, the Ministry of Planning has had considerable difficulty communicating broad planning goals to communities and other state agencies. Officials of the Sustainable Development Unit (housed in the Ministry of Planning, Development and the Environment), originally involved in abortive attempts to establish an SDC, have tried to promote intersectoral collaboration, information flows, and effective coordination of activities, but they lack the institutional resources. Some of the better-organized private sector stakeholders, such as the Chambers of Commerce and Small Industry and the Tourism Association, have been consulted at times on policies that affect their interests, but these consultations are episodic, policy-specific, and limited to organized groups that already have established relationships with ministries and state agencies.

36. Interview with Henry Shillingford, Programme Director, Dominica Conservation Association, Roseau, Dominica, 8 June 1999. Mr. Shillingford did not question the importance of NANGO or its dedication to stakeholder participation, only its organizational capacity. At the time of this interview NANGO consisted of one executive (also the head of a local NGO) and one staff person.

Recently, officials in the Saint Lucia Sustainable Development Unit have shown an interest in reviving proposals for an SDC (or equivalent body) and have looked to the Grenada example. At the time of this writing, the Unit is still in a kind of legal limbo. As one senior official put it,

It does not really have the legal authority to do anything. One strong proposal would elevate the unit to the status of a full-fledged department of the ministry. It certainly needs it, especially the additional staffing and resources that would come with being a department. The current workload already overwhelms the capacity of the unit. For example, the climate change program alone has taken on dimensions that would warrant a unit unto itself.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Grenada SDC: Survivability and Perhaps Success**

Grenada is the only one of the original six Capacity 21 Caribbean SIDS that still has a functioning SDC. Naturally, we are interested in the reasons for its continuation, but we are more interested in the relationship between its survivability and its efficacy in carrying out its intended functions.<sup>38</sup>

The Grenada SDC was officially launched on 29 February 1996 at the Capacity 21 National Consultation convened and supported by CARICAD and UNDP. Its initial meetings were kept small—thirteen invited participants. On 21 October 1996 a three-member subcommittee of the council met to organize a retreat to clarify its objectives and to reconsider its methods, structure, decision-making processes, role, relationship to government and rules for conducting meetings. A strategic retreat was held on 23 November and 7 December 1996 for the general membership to consider the findings of the subcommittee. After the retreat, additional invitations to participate were issued and the council achieved its present size (approximately forty-five members). In November of 1997, CARICAD held a workshop to evaluate the accomplishments and needs of the Grenada SDC.

These early and intensive stock-taking exercises identified a number of barriers to a fully functioning SDC. Some have since been addressed although not completely overcome, some have proven chronic, and all are ongoing areas of concern for current members. According to the CARICAD workshop report,

In order for the SDC to be effective in fulfilling its mandate to coordinate national sustainable development activities, it needs to have a clear legal

37. Personal interview by Rosenberg with an anonymous highly placed official of the Ministry of Planning, Development and the Environment, Government of Saint Lucia, Castries, Saint Lucia, 12 February 2002.

38. The following personal interviews conducted by Rosenberg are referenced below: George Grant, President/CEO, Grant Communications, St. George's, Grenada, 21 January 2002; Joseph Antoine, President, Friends of the Earth—Grenada, St. George's, Grenada, 19 December 2001; Ricky Morain, Ministry of Finance, St. George's, Grenada, 17 December 2001; Sandra C.A. Ferguson, Secretary-General, Agency for Rural Transformation, St. George's, Grenada, 5 December 2001; Dr. Linus Spencer Thomas, Consultant, Ministry of Finance and Planning and Chairman, Sustainable Development Council, St. George's, Grenada, 17 December 2001 and 30 January 2002.

framework and sufficient support and resources, as well as the political will to carry out its mandate. Having the SDC formally identified within the decision making structure of government would enable it to impact on policies related to sustainable development. It was also recognized that a Secretariat was needed to sustain and facilitate the work of the SDC as a focal point for information and coordination.<sup>39</sup>

Problems that relate to the political will of the council and leadership alone have been effectively addressed. Those related to communication among members are ongoing but are being dealt with constructively. Those having to do with representation are probably chronic. The extent to which the SDC actually affects policy outcomes has proven impossible to measure; conclusions can only be impressionistic. The problems of securing resources for the regular operations of the SDC and maintaining a secretariat have not yet been solved.

The Grenada SDC has met monthly, almost uninterrupted, since its inception.<sup>40</sup> At the time of this writing the council had met for sixty-five regular sessions. Attendance has averaged about 25 members per meeting. While the government, NGOs, and private sectors are all represented at every meeting, government and quasi-governmental agencies are typically in the majority. The most regular attendees are those representing a few government agencies and NGOs. The NGO community is typically represented by the Agency for Rural Transformation (a provider of economic development, health, education, and environmental services for rural communities which hosts the meetings at its headquarters) and Friends of the Earth (usually represented by its president, a founding member of the SDC). Two community organizations concerned with local development, from the rural parishes of St. Andrew's and St. David's, are also regularly represented. The Chair is a consultant to the Ministry of Finance and Planning. He has chaired the SDC since its inception, at which time he was General Director of Finance and Planning. One or two other mid-level officials from Finance and Planning are usually in attendance as well. The Ministry of Agriculture is the next most frequently represented government agency, most often by an official of the Forestry and National Parks Department. Private sector representation is more sporadic. Among agricultural interests, the National Cane Farmers' Association and the Cooperative Nutmeg Association are most frequently in attendance. There is a notable lack of regular attendance by business interests related to tourism (hotel and restaurant owners), transportation (taxi and bus drivers), manufacturing and small businesses. Educational institutions and related government agencies are rarely represented. Representatives from the local community college have attended, but usually for special occasions only. Primary and secondary school teachers and administrators are conspicuously absent, as are representatives from St. George's Univer-

39. Caribbean Centre for Development Administration 1997, 8.

40. The following description is taken from the official minutes of monthly meetings since January 1998, and participant observation of meetings in July 1999, November, December and January, 2002. Beginning in late 2003 Friends of the Earth stopped attending meetings and St. George's University and a local representative of the Nature Conservancy began attending.

sity.<sup>41</sup> And there has been only intermittent representation of the trade union movement. Approximately 27 percent of regular attendees are women. Women are among the most regularly attending and vocal members of the council and we have observed no formal or obvious informal impediments to the full participation of women.<sup>42</sup>

The topics discussed at the regular meetings of the Grenada SDC have remained quite true to its original mandate as laid out in Agenda 21 and its own Terms of Reference. It concerns itself with fundamental issues of development affecting the island, focusing on issues of environmental sustainability, with discussions often revolving around Grenada's participation in international environmental conventions. The agendas for council meetings also reflect a keen awareness of the vulnerabilities of small-island developing states, and the council has become the principal venue for the discussion of contemporary economic and social issues in Grenada.

Presentations and discussions tend to follow a particular set of issues, policies or programs over the course of several months. Attempts are made, under the rubric of SDC meetings and through *ad hoc* committees, to provide input to reports and other documents of policy planning, implementation, and review.

Although the Grenada SDC has not achieved the formal statutory status envisioned in Capacity 21, it does have a kind of official standing. Administrative support comes mainly from a staff member in the Ministry of Finance; the office that the SDC chair occupies in his position as consultant to the ministry also serves as the SDC office. Most importantly, the SDC is required to submit its minutes and recommendations to the Permanent Secretary of Finance and Planning who, in turn, is obligated to consider SDC input in his reports to Cabinet.<sup>43</sup>

The ministry provides in-kind support for the council's meetings and organizational activities. In 2001, the council received a small grant from the University of the West Indies for a public awareness program to raise the profile of the council and its mission, and to help make the council a point of contact for citizens wishing to express opinions and provide information on issues related to sustainable development.

In this manner the Grenada SDC inches forward toward fulfilling its mission. It continues to face the same structural impediments that have stymied the formation of viable councils in Dominica and Saint Lucia, but it endures. Within the council, opinion varies as to its actual purpose and efficacy and the reasons it survives; but members, regardless of affiliation, all agree that the council is of value to them and their organizations.

41. The absence of St. George's University is significant for three reasons: (1) The university is the leading institution of higher education in the country, with unmatched research and educational facilities for medicine, public health and ecology; (2) the university is perhaps the largest single generator of income and foreign exchange; and (3) university operations and development have significant environmental and economic impacts.

42. This is not to say that gender is never a factor in the content or method of SDC deliberations, but an analysis of that question is beyond the scope of the research being reported here.

43. The authors tried unsuccessfully to interview the Permanent Secretary for this study.



### *Survey Results and Analysis*

Twenty-nine current members of the Grenada SDC responded to a questionnaire asking them to: (1) evaluate the SDC's performance of particular roles and functions identified in the council's terms of reference; (2) rate the importance of those roles and functions to the overall mission of the council; (3) rate the council's ability to represent relevant categories of interest; (4) evaluate the resources and capabilities of the council; and (5) evaluate the contribution that the council makes to sustainable development.

#### *1. SDC Performance*

In rating the ability of the SDC to affect policy made and implemented by the Government of Grenada, only one respondent (3 percent) thought the council was "not at all effective." Twenty-one percent thought that it was "rarely effective;" 21 percent, "sometimes effective;" 17 percent, "frequently effective;" and 38 percent "could not tell."

This was the weakest area of efficacy reported by the survey. It is, however, significant that the largest number of respondents felt that they could not tell whether they were being effective. In personal interviews, members from all three constituent groups (government, private sector, and NGO/CBO) were willing to speculate that the SDC had gotten the government's attention on certain issues such as sand mining and agricultural policy. Government members were most likely and NGO members were least likely to believe that the council was affecting at least some government decisions. The Friends of the Earth representative, for example, felt that the council was ineffective because it did not take an advocacy role and would be able to affect policy only if it acted as a pressure group on government. The Secretary General of the Agency for Rural Transformation argued that there was a positive relationship between the council's low efficacy and its survivability, arguing that it survives because "it has no teeth" and therefore does not threaten any entrenched interests.

The chair indicated that the original mandate of the SDC clearly precludes advocacy. In fact, he argued that the very composition of the SDC reflects its exclusively advisory and consultative functions. Since the body includes senior members of public sector agencies and statutory bodies, parliamentary officials, and members of the diplomatic community, advocacy on any issue would be clearly inappropriate. He maintains that the SDC can be, and has been, an effective forum for the initial airing and analysis of advocacy positions, and that such positions coming from the membership may be reflected in the minutes and recommendations that the council submits to government, but pressuring government for a particular action or promoting a particular position are not among the council's functions. This has been a point of contention between the council's leadership and at least one of its NGO members, leading to the recent withdrawal of Friends of the Earth Grenada from active participation.

The SDC scored much higher on its ability to affect the implementation of externally funded development projects (e.g., implementing international con-

ventions and regional programs on climate change, desertification, biodiversity, biosafety, and food security). Sixty-four percent found the council to be effective “sometimes” or “frequently.” In that regard the council has shown itself to be consistent with the intentions of Agenda 21 and useful to the government. Where international conventions have required stakeholder participation and national implementing committees, the government has often handed those assignments to the SDC, thus creating a symbiotic relationship between the council and government. Government, chronically short on human resources, gets expert assistance with meeting its obligations to international organizations; the council gets opportunities for substantive deliberations on matters of national importance.

The SDC is most valued by its members (regardless of sector) for its information functions. Eighty-eight percent felt that the council was “sometimes” or “frequently” effective in providing channels of information about issues and policies affecting environmentally sustainable development. Eleven percent felt they “could not tell.” Sixty-nine percent found the SDC “frequently effective” and 21 percent, “sometimes effective” as a venue for discussing and debating issues. All respondents interviewed agreed that the SDC provided a forum for the discussion of important issues that was not available anywhere else in Grenada. All found the monthly meetings to be intrinsically interesting and worth the effort, if only for the intellectual stimulation. This finding is supported by the regular attendance at monthly meetings and the written comments of some respondents indicating that their participation in discussions at SDC meetings enriched their subsequent presentations to their respective organizations. Thus, the SDC may be considered a source of intellectual capacity building contributing to more informed policy positions by public- and private-sector organizations.

## 2. SDC Roles and Functions

Council members place a great deal of importance on all four basic functions: affecting government policy and externally funded projects, disseminating information, and providing a venue for debate on issues of sustainable development. But members seem to have adjusted their expectations to reality. Twenty-one percent considered affecting government policy an “important” part of the SDC’s mission, 36 percent felt it was “very important,” and 39 percent felt it was “extremely important.” Interviews revealed varying degrees of disappointment and resignation about the council’s ability to affect government decision-making. All respondents identified particular government decisions that seemed to reflect SDC input. Officials of government and parastatal agencies felt confident that the Permanent Secretary read and took the council minutes into account. The one private-sector representative interviewed felt that the government-of-the-day was unresponsive in general, and had not singled out the SDC to ignore. NGO officials felt that the council should work outside of government as a lobbying, pressure or public interest group in addition to its semi-

formal relationship to the Ministry of Finance. None were satisfied with the responsiveness of government to the council on issues of sustainability.

The survey reflects the very high value that members place on the informational and intellectual benefits of membership. Forty-eight percent felt that providing channels of information about issues and policies affecting environmentally sustainable development was "very important" and another 48 percent felt that it was "extremely important." Fifty percent responded that discussing and debating issues related to environmentally sustainable development was "very important" and 50% thought it "extremely important." Interviews reveal that while these numbers reflect the intellectual benefits of membership, they also reveal that members regularly use information garnered from SDC meetings in their professional duties. They consider the information, especially the formal presentations which are a feature of each meeting, of a very high quality and take seriously their responsibility to communicate with and represent the interests of their constituents and colleagues. One respondent remarked, "Despite the apparent shortcomings, the SDC is the best representation of civil society involvement in issues of sustainable development in the country."

### *3. Representation on the SDC*

Most respondents found representation on the SDC less than satisfactory. Government officials are the largest of the three groups of council members. Sixty-six percent (19 of 25) respondents identified their primary affiliation as "government agency, statutory body, department or ministry;" 17 percent, "nongovernmental or community-based organization;" 3 percent, "private sector (business or trade organization);" 3 percent, "trade union or other employees' or workers' organization;" and 10 percent, "other." There were no representatives of educational institutions among the respondents.

All subjects interviewed found representation inadequate in similar ways. The small number of private-sector representatives was attributed to a lack of interest and/or benefit for larger businesses, and logistical and practical impediments for smaller businesses. Few small businesspeople can take two or three hours out of a weekday to attend a meeting that does not bring immediate material benefits. Therefore, critical economic actors in the retail businesses, transportation, manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, and the informal sectors do not attend. NGO members felt that grassroots organizations from outside the capital were disadvantaged by the location of the meetings in St. George's, as well as by the content and level of discussions. Lack of representation of educational institutions (administrators, faculty or students) was explained by apparent lack of interest. But in their positive assessments of the informational and debate functions of the council, all interviewees revealed a preference for an elite-level body that facilitates informed and often technical exchanges. This aspect benefits from factors that tend to limit private sector and grassroots representation. All interviewees also felt that the current size of the SDC was optimal for lively discussion and constructive interaction.

Thus, while the Grenada SDC remains true to the tripartite structure established under the Capacity 21 project, private sector and NGO/CBO representation is not as inclusive as members would like. However, the imbalance among the three sectors is reflected more in numbers of attendees than in voice or input in council debates and deliberations. Despite representation skewed in favor of government, no one felt that the government representatives dominated proceedings. It was felt that the chair conducted meetings in an evenhanded manner and that NGO and private sector representatives were vocal and assertive. Substantive problems of representation manifest themselves within, rather than among, sectors.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents to the survey characterized representation as either "broad but uneven," or "as good as possible." Twenty-six percent called it "broad and inclusive." Only seven percent called it "limited" and none characterized it as "narrow and restricted."

It should also be noted that self-selection plays an important part in council membership. Officially, the council is open to all groups and individuals. Written comments on the survey indicated that actual attendance at a meeting was the critical factor in convincing them to join. Several respondents indicated that personal development was their main motivation for attending meetings.

#### *4. Resources and Capabilities of the SDC*

Members' evaluations of the performance, methods, leadership, and resources of the SDC were consistent with their assessments of its roles and functions. There was broad agreement that funding is inadequate, reflecting the fact that until the University of West Indies grant was secured in 2001, no external funding was available after Capacity 21 ended in 1997. Sixty-one percent characterized funding as "poor;" 32 percent, "fair;" and only 7 percent, "good." All but one respondent (3 percent) felt that the frequency of meetings (monthly) and the quality of presentations were "good," "very good," or "excellent." All respondents characterized the quality of discussions as "good," "very good," or "excellent."

Leadership of the Grenada SDC has been praised throughout the Eastern Caribbean. Officials of CARICAD and in the Saint Lucia Ministry of Planning, Development and Environment felt that the longevity of the Grenada SDC was attributable in large measure to its chair. Members tended to agree, but not so unequivocally. Eleven percent rated leadership as only "fair;" 29 percent, "good;" 50 percent, "very good;" and 26 percent, "excellent." In addition, evaluation of leadership likely reflects not just impressions of the chair but of the Management Team and ad hoc committees as well.

Most interviewees gave considerable credit to the chair for keeping the council going, including those from the NGO sector who expressed some dissatisfaction with the lack of leadership initiative on certain issues and the unwillingness of the chair to allow the council to advocate particular positions. This view is supported by the fact that the SDC went through a short hiatus in

early 1998 when the chair left his post as Director General of the Ministry of Finance and Planning, and reconvened only when he was reappointed chair by the Minister of Finance in September.

Members' ranking of the SDC's overall effectiveness also reflected a combination of frustration, limited expectations, and satisfaction with the way the council functions given the limits of its relationship with government and the underrepresented sectors. Three percent rated "overall effectiveness" as "poor;" 20 percent, "fair;" 52 percent, "good;" 24 percent, "very good;" and none rated it "excellent."

The inability of the council to function as a direct advocate for change was identified as the major source of frustration. One member remarked that the SDC is a "rubber stamp for the government."

### *5. The SDC's Contribution to Sustainable Development*

Members were asked to rate the council's effectiveness in carrying out the core missions prescribed by Agenda 21. On its contribution to national capacity for effective stakeholder participation, one respondent (3 percent) felt it made "no contribution;" 17 percent rated the contribution "marginal;" 21 percent, "occasionally significant;" and 59 percent, "important." None, however, characterized the SDC as a "national leader." Given the structural limitations on its efficacy and the misgivings that many members have about the council's ability to affect government decisions, these responses demonstrate the fairly high value that members place on discussion, debate, and the dissemination of information as participatory processes.

This finding is further illustrated by the somewhat lower rating that members gave to the SDC's contribution to ensuring sustainability of national development policies and programs. Thirty percent rated the council's contribution "marginal;" 30 percent, "occasionally significant;" and 41 percent, "important."

Finally, as an additional measure of the SDC's contribution to capacity building, members were asked to rate its contribution to the development of human resources related to sustainable development. Thirty-three percent found its contribution "marginal;" 30 percent, "significant;" 33 percent, "important;" and one respondent (3 percent) characterized it as a "national leader."

These last findings are reflected in statements by interviewees expressing frustrations over the limitations of the SDC as a contributor to capacity building and sustainability but strong support for its continued existence. As mentioned above, some respondents cited particular policies and issues in which they felt the SDC had been influential. Others conceded that they simply could not tell whether the SDC was influencing government. All stated that SDC meetings were informative in ways that helped them introduce considerations of sustainability into their own professional activities and provided a forum for airing their particular concerns. And all pointed to the intrinsic if intangible benefits of a fairly broad-based, sophisticated forum for debate and discussion.

## Conclusions

The three cases examined in this article offer some lessons for the survivability of Sustainable Development Councils and similar representative and consultative bodies concerned with environmentally sustainable development policy. They also raise some questions about the efficacy and desirability of such bodies. We conclude that such bodies can survive and that members can derive significant if intangible benefits for themselves while producing diffuse, indirect benefits for society. Furthermore, the relationship between efficacy and survivability is not linear; in fact, to survive, councils may have to avoid attempts to affect policy directly in ways that challenge government decision-makers and institutionalized relationships between the state and private sector. Finally, SDCs represent a particular type of venue for stakeholder participation in which discourse and agendas are limited to areas and methods that do not always embrace the interests or orientations of grassroots and certain private sector actors, but which can still bring together a fairly wide variety of public and private sector interests and viewpoints.

Brown and Fox argue that interorganizational coalitions can help to overcome accountability problems and become important venues for defining environmental problems, setting directions for sustainable policies and implementing and revising policies and programs.<sup>44</sup> The critical function is “bridging,” whereby new organizational arrangements open lines of communication and help create and define common purpose among disparate stakeholders.

The effectiveness of such coalitions may be “facilitated by preexisting organizational relationships,” which seems to have been the case in Grenada.<sup>45</sup> But they can also be undermined by preexisting relationships as seen in Dominica and Saint Lucia. Given the limited human resources in the Eastern Caribbean, it can be expected that such coalitions will benefit from the commitment of a relatively small number of “bridging individuals” who dedicate considerable effort to resisting the “tremendous centrifugal forces” acting upon them.<sup>46</sup> In Grenada, those individuals are found among the leadership and core members of the council. While this has led to the underrepresentation of NGOs, CBOs, and the business community, active SDC members from those sectors have generally understood and accepted the attendant limitations. In contrast, insistence by the president of Friends of the Earth Grenada that the SDC act as a source of external pressure on government led to that organization’s exit from the council, leaving the local representatives of the Nature Conservancy as the sole members from an environmental NGO.

In Saint Lucia, collaborative resource management projects have been facilitated by NGOs perhaps to a larger extent than in Grenada. But Saint Lucia has had no success to date in institutionalizing an SDC. Significantly, although

44. Brown and Fox 1998, 449–450.

45. Brown and Fox 1998, 454–455.

46. Brown and Fox 1998, 455.

the Caribbean Natural Resource Institute (CANARI—formerly based in Saint Lucia) and the National Trust have been leaders in participatory natural resource management in Saint Lucia, neither organization was involved in attempts to establish a council, focusing their efforts instead on particular resource management projects.<sup>47</sup>

In Dominica, the leading environmental NGO—the Dominica Conservation Association—acts primarily as a pressure group on government. Its leadership believes that despite Dominica’s historical tradition of local participation, government and state agencies have taken an antagonistic approach to NGOs and CBOs since the 1980s.<sup>48</sup> State officials assigned to the role of “bridging individuals” in the nascent Dominica SDC lacked the established relationships and credibility to overcome established relationships between state development agencies and the private sector or the mutual suspicions of government and the NGO community. Dominica’s progress in bringing stakeholders together to manage natural resources has happened outside the rubric of the SDC or its successor organization and without the cooperation of established environmental NGOs.

Therefore, although the Grenada SDC may be mainly a “talk shop,” that does not mean it is of no value. Clearly, its members value it. They benefit from discussions and presentations that are often lively and represent sharply divergent opinions on issues of great importance to small island developing states, including climate change, deforestation, biodiversity, emergency preparedness, sea level rise, ozone depletion, agriculture, poverty eradication, hazard mitigation, physical planning, coastal zone management, and solid waste management. There is an intrinsic benefit in keeping state officials in line agencies, NGOs, and businesses well informed on these subjects. Furthermore, government is made aware of these discussions. The council has also contributed substantive input to the Grenadian components of international treaties, conventions, and protocols related to sustainable development. And if the current public awareness strategy is successful, the SDC may become a national clearinghouse for information and debate on sustainable development.

Eventually, the Grenada SDC may help to articulate what Barry refers to as an “ecological contract” through which an “ecological common good” is generalized to a wide range of development policies.<sup>49</sup> The massive destruction visited upon Grenada by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004 has created opportunities for making sustainability a guiding principle for reconstruction efforts. The new *National Environmental Policy and Management Strategy*, presented to Cabinet in December 2004, mentions the Sustainable Development Council as a key element in building capacity for “policy analysis and formulation” and

47. Personal communication between Dr. Thomas and Yves Renard, former director of CANARI, 23 December 2004.

48. Personal interview by Rosenberg with Atherton Martin, Director of the Dominica Conservation Association, Roseau, Dominica, 26 May 1998.

49. Barry 1996, 121–122.

“promoting the sharing of skills and expertise among environmental management agencies.”<sup>50</sup>

Still, the Grenada SDC cannot claim many clear victories in influencing government actions. But the contrasting cases of Dominica and Saint Lucia show that survivability of SDCs is not directly related to effectiveness in domestic policy contests. In both Dominica and Saint Lucia, the councils were given formal relationships to state and quasi-governmental institutions that were meant to insert them into established policy-making and evaluation processes. And in both cases, the councils met resistance. In Dominica, the National Development Council practically ignored the SDC. In Saint Lucia, the existing relationship between the Ministry of Planning and the Development Control Authority helped keep the SDC outside of the planning process. In Grenada, the vagueness of the institutional relationship between the SDC and the Ministry of Finance and Planning allows the Permanent Secretary nearly complete discretion in the way he uses (or ignores) SDC input. While Grenada SDC members remain frustrated and/or uncertain about their ability to influence policy in this way, council leadership does not find itself having to fight its way through already established relationships with competing private interests. Therefore, while the council may only occasionally be influential in government, it is unlikely to be seen as threatening.

Finally, as institutions of stakeholder participation and capacity building, SDCs are of limited but not insignificant value. Alone, they cannot come close to fully implementing Agenda 21’s call for integrated and institutionalized participatory practices; but they do provide a particular kind of elite-level participation not available elsewhere. The tripartite membership structure; the combination of invited and self-selected membership; and the emphasis on debate, discussion, and formal presentations of sometimes abstract and technical issues indirectly discriminate against many grassroots and business interests. The inability of SDCs to solve specific developmental and environmental problems or promote particular economic interests for their members makes them appealing mainly to those who value and can contribute to dialogue on sustainable development and related issues. But those who participate represent a variety of government agencies, quasi-governmental organizations, and NGOs whose activities do affect the sustainability of development in small-island developing states.

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50. Ministry of Health, Social Security, the Environment and Ecclesiastic Relations 2004, 34–36.



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