

PRESS RELEASE

Kalinago students 'Planting for the Planet' with support from UNDP's SSLR Project in observance of International Forest Day 2022

Roseau: 23 March 2022: Sparkling eyes and beaming faces sprung from a field of laughter as students across the Kalinago Territory in the Commonwealth of Dominica actively participated in building a more climate-resilient country. In celebration of International Forests Day on March 21, 2022, students from the Salybia Primary School, Sineku Primary School, Concord Primary School and Atkinson Primary School came out to plant fruit trees on their school compounds. The initiative formed part of activities spearheaded by the Strengthening Sustainable Livelihoods and Resilience in the Kalinago Territory (SSLR) Project being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in collaboration with the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica through the Forestry Wildlife and Parks Division with support from the India-UN Fund and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation.



Sineku Primary School Students with the Principal, Forestry Officers and Project Coordinator Nickez McPherson | Photo Credit: Zaimis Olmos/UNDP

"We love fruits!" chimed students of Salybia Primary School as they admired their handiwork. They planted several fruit trees around their school which included sapodilla, mango, guava, cherry, pommecythere, pommerac and avocado. The young students ages ranging from 5 to 11 are excited to take care of their newly planted trees and cannot wait to taste the fruits!

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Salybia Primary School Students | Photo Credit: Zaimis Olmos/UNDP

Senior Teacher at the Sineku Primary School Willa Cyrille said that the tree planting drive signifies a huge step in raising the awareness of the importance of our forests and will also teach the students the significance of proper nutrition. “We know that the objective is to reforest the Kalinago Territory at some point, however the planting of the fruit trees here today is very significant in that we are not only speaking to reforestation, but we are also speaking to nutrition and food security at the school. We know that eventually these trees are going to bear fruits that the children can enjoy and will bring back some natural foods into their diet that are lacking in some cases. We are very happy and honored to be a part of this whole process”, Cyrille noted.

Students were assisted by teachers, forestry officers and UNDP representatives who donated the trees under the SSLR Project. Project Coordinator Nickez McPherson said that the team was elated to be a part of this important venture which supports the United Nations General Assembly’s goal in raising awareness on the importance of the forest. “One of the goals of this intervention is the successful implementation of a reforestation programme to augment livelihoods and protect the environment. It is therefore fitting that the project team felt it important to incorporate the students of the 4-H Clubs of the primary schools in the Kalinago Territory in planting trees on International Day of Forests. This awareness activity also forms part of the sustainability plan of the project to encourage students to become custodians of the environment”, McPherson said.

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Concord Primary School Students with Project Coordinator Nickez McPherson
Photo Credit: Zaimis Olmos/UNDP

Forests are vital for sustainable food production and forest ecosystem services such as the maintenance of biodiversity, climate regulation, water and soil quality, and pollination are essential for sustainable agri-food systems and feeding a growing global population. In addition, more than three-quarters of rural households worldwide are estimated to harvest wild foods from forests and other environments. Kalinago Chief Lorenzo Sanford expressed his gratitude to the UNDP Team; an initiative he thinks will definitely benefit the students and the Kalinago people in the future. He said that the trees are very native to the Kalinago space.

Minister of the Environment, Rural Modernisation and Kalinago Upliftment, Honorable Cozier Frederick said the day's observance marked the invaluable importance of our forests and this collaboration with UNDP and the SSLR Project reminds us that our youth can play a vital role in protecting our forests. He said Dominica's ecosystem remains resilient and relevant, even after massive destruction by natural disasters. "Dominica can boast of sixty percent vegetative cover and perhaps the greatest percentage of protective areas in our hemisphere totaling over twenty-one percent. We have a forest ecosystem which has proven to be relevant and resilient. This was evident after the ravages caused by Hurricane David in 1979 and most recent Tropical Storm Erica in 2015 and Hurricane Maria in 2017. On all occasions the forest reemerged in rather quick time", Honorable Frederick said.

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Atkinson Primary School Students with UN Volunteer Hannah Frederick
Photo Credit: Zaimis Olmos/UNDP

With the support of the Division of Forestry, Wildlife and Parks, several key initiatives have also been implemented as part of the reforestation activities. Namely, community sensitization meetings that underscore the importance of planting trees which provide environmental protection, increase water levels of identified water sources and create a buffer between agricultural lands and these water sources. Further, over fifty (50) individuals from the Kalinago Territory have been engaged under a 'cash for trees programme to provide support for the planting of trees. These activities commenced in October 2021 will continue until the end of the intervention in June 2022.

Sustainable management and use of forests and their resources are key to combating climate change and contributing to the prosperity and well-being of current and future generations. Forests also play a crucial role in poverty alleviation and in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This year, International Forest Day was observed under the theme: 'Forests and sustainable production and consumption'.

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