

Global Change and Caribbean Vulnerability: Environment, Economy and Society at Risk?

The fifth in the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers British-Caribbean Seminar Series was held at the Department of Geography and Geology, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica, July 24-28, 2006. The Seminar was organised by Dr David Dodman and Professor David Barker (Department of Geography, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus) and Dr Duncan McGregor (Department of Geography, Royal Holloway), with the financial support of the RGS/IBG Conference Fund, and of the Climate Change Research Group and the Developing Areas Research Group of RGS/IBG. These funds were used to subsidise general costs, and specifically to provide free conference attendance, including fieldtrips, for 8 postgraduate students from the Caribbean region.

The meeting had a truly international flavour, including as it did participants from the UK, Netherlands, USA, Canada and 8 Caribbean Territories (Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua, St Lucia, Trinidad, Guyana, Haiti and Suriname), who enjoyed 3 days of research presentations and 2 field days.

Over 50 participants took part, with 32 papers ranging across the geographical spectrum from regional and sub-regional climate prediction to the social impacts of environmental change and globalisation. The papers were presented within the themes of changing global climate systems and the Caribbean, coastal vulnerability to climate change, hazard vulnerability in small island developing states, vulnerable physical environments, vulnerabilities of land and agriculture under changing climates, and vulnerability and economic development. The organisers are particularly indebted to Dr David Howard (Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh) for organising a stimulating session on urban vulnerabilities in the Caribbean. Several 'local' and 'international' postgraduates presented in these sessions, and this Next Generation acquitted itself with distinction.

Two field days underscored the human and physical vulnerabilities of Jamaica in terms of rural economic development and coastal vulnerabilities, and stimulated much debate. The organisers are indebted to Professor Ted Robinson (Department of Geography and Geology, UWI) for his research insights on coastal vulnerabilities.

'Team spirit' was fostered by a variety of evening social occasions, which provided ample opportunity for individual exchanges of research experience and ideas, and for 'networking'. A particular highlight was a keynote address by Dr the Honourable Omar Davies, MP, Jamaica's Minister of Finance and Planning, who reflected, through his background in geography and planning, on economic and social vulnerability in small island states such as Jamaica; this presented at an opening evening reception kindly sponsored by the University of the West Indies (Mona) and the Community Co-operative Credit Union Ltd.

A successful publication outcome is anticipated. Negotiations are under way with the University of the West Indies Press to produce substantive Proceedings, and Special Issues of the regional journal, *Caribbean Geography*, are anticipated. This will mirror the outputs from previous seminars, which have resulted in three edited volumes and five Special Issues of *Caribbean Geography*.

In this context, the organisers of the meeting are presently drawing up a synopsis of the principal conclusions drawn from the meeting. This will not only act as a suitable postscript for the major publications anticipated, but as a strategy document to inform the wider research and decision-making community of the principal problems associated with *Global Change and Caribbean Vulnerability*, and the major research directions crucial to the alleviation of these problems.

David Dodman, David Barker and Duncan McGregor