

ABSTRACT

This study describes the development of an Environmental Degradation Index (EDI) for Trinidad. This would provide a single figure, which would demonstrate the level of degradation of Trinidad's natural environment. The EDI expresses the level of degradation and ecological integrity of ecosystems.

The EDI is a sub-index of the Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI). The EVI is an international project, which was developed by the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC). The project was initiated due to a call made by the Barbados Plan of Action, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and by global recognition that small island developing states (SIDS) have increased environmental vulnerability due to their small size, insularity, remoteness, limited natural resources, fragile ecosystems, higher frequency and impacts of natural disasters. The two main sources of data utilized for this study included locally published reports and the Internet.

Trinidad is an island with limited natural resources. However these resources are rich and productive as demonstrated by the large number of animal and plant species, diverse forests types, abundant fisheries and vast reserves of petroleum products and quarrying materials. Unsustainable practices and utilization of these resources threaten to degrade and reduce their productivity and sustained use in the near future. The findings of this study indicate that the natural environment of Trinidad is subject to varying levels of degradation. Areas of high vulnerability,

which emerged during this study, include Trinidad's biodiversity, fisheries, forests, coastal and marine habitats. Areas of low vulnerability included freshwater availability and levels of quarrying and mining.

One major obstacle to the accurate development of an EDI was the data quality of statistics locally available. Problems included the outdated nature of available data, inconsistencies with data supplied by government ministries and within government publications, discrepancies in international statistics in relation to Trinidad compared to local figures, and the unavailability of data for certain indicators.