

**Antigua and Barbuda  
Consultation for Civil Society Organization  
On  
The Caribbean Single Market and Economy  
Key Issues and Concerns**

**A CARICOM INITIATIVE**

**Supported by the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and  
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**Coordinated by Civil Society Coordinating Committee.**

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## **\*\*Main recommendations/Issues for consideration**

### **Key Issues coming out of the Civil Society National Consultation on the CSME**

#### **1. Human Resource Development:**

1.1 One of the first challenges that must be addressed is engendering a change of mind set. We must begin to think regionally, not locally. We must see ourselves as Caribbean people, not as Antiguan, Jamaicans or Kittitians. This is going to require a major educational program or marketing campaign. The continual dissemination of information, as the process evolves, should be a critical part of the program.

Then what is the role of the private sector in this process? The role of the private sector is one that involves productivity and the creation of new wealth. This depends on the education and training systems that are in place. This means there must be synergy between the private and public sectors. The private sector demands qualified workers and public sector, through the school system, prepares individuals for positions. The private sector then must take an active role in the education and training process.

1.2 There must be partnerships formed with the public sector. There must be collaboration between all stakeholders such as the schools, the private sector, the Ministry of Education, Planning and the Board of Education who funds the scholarships. One possible model is the establishment of school boards with representation from all the stakeholders identified above.

1.3 That brings us to the question of standards. There must be a process in place that establishes standards and certification to ensure certain skill levels are attained and maintained in the various occupations – e.g. plumbers, electricians, carpenters etc. Currently there is no standardization. Standards in one area may be different in another and there is no method of recognizing one's skill level. There needs to be a body such as a board that sets out what needs to be learned, how the requirements can be fulfilled whether it's through formal education or through apprenticeship. So that when a plumber moves from one area to another, one can be assured that he/she has the required level of expertise.

Certification for non-formal and adult education is essential to facilitate free movement of people and *choice* of movement - regional employability. We must understand each others' skill levels via standardization and certification. We must begin to produce to international standards.

1.4 We should not "buy Caribbean" simply because we are committed to the development of the Caribbean. This may perpetuate the systems of corruption, patronage and general mismanagement and inefficiency. We need to focus on greater efficiency in productivity, seek to reduce operating and production costs and thereby ensure the ongoing and increasing demand for our products and services in a global environment.

1.5 Ignorance is more expensive than education Private sector needs to invest in employees' education to produce quality service and service-providers. Appropriate economic and other incentives to organizations and businesses that invest in HRD of their members & employees.

1.6 An inventory of our skills must be undertaken – we need to become multi-skilled. We need to know what we have so we can identify what we will need for future development. We must have access to our collective skills banks and develop relevant skills in our people.

1.7 Create at a national level a culture of regionalism at all levels of Civil Society.

1.8 There should be a regionally accredited non-traditional approach to education and training. This will assist in the development of formal and informal systems of business. Education for Living and Economic Opportunities are possible areas for training. We must also focus on skills for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

**\*\*1.9 Tripartism is critical – no one entity can achieve this unity on its own. We must develop a national culture of cooperation – private sector entities, community groups, social clubs, labour organizations, etc. must be encouraged to co-operate to further develop their membership. In this regard, we endorse PROMALCO (Programme for Labour Management Cooperation), an ILO initiative that is currently being implemented in a number of participating territories. We also salute the Barbadian social partnership model. Both initiatives provide us with the opportunity to study and replicate best practices.**

**\*\*1.10 URGENT & CRITICAL: Public relations and marketing strategies and campaigns on the programmes, plans and achievements of regionalism to ensure the success of the CSME – residents need free access to information – strategic dissemination of information on CSME on doctors shelves, store counters, etc.**

## **2. Justice and Governance:**

2.1 Non-accountability and lack of transparency thrive in an environment of dependence and ignorance.

**2.2 \*\*Fundamental to the achievement of accountability and transparency in the governance of our societies is the involvement and participation of people in all strata of society in the life of the community as is reasonably possible. This involvement and participation in the life our communities will serve to eliminate the twin cycles of dependence and ignorance.**

2.3 There has to be a decided and deliberate shift from the dependence on the Government and Government officials to provide the means of livelihood and the standard of living of the individual and simultaneously the empowerment of people to take hold of or create the opportunities for enhancing the quality of their lives.

**2.4 \*\*The empowerment of people in this manner may be achieved**

- A. by the provision of information itself and equipping people with the tools by which they can gain information,**
- B. by the development of a communication, public relations and public education strategy focusing on the opportunities which will be gained through regional integration.**
- C. by re-educating people to think region-wide rather than island-wide**
- D. by the creation of an umbrella CSO Organization with a mandate of strengthening and supporting individual CSOs in their initiatives to educate an empower their membership and to provide a conduit through which information may be disseminated. The creation of the umbrella CSO would best be accomplished by establishing national CSO networks and by forging workable partnerships between Governments and CSOs.**
- E. by the establishment of the CCJ which serves as a unifying institution as the ultimate judicial decision maker, resourced by persons who come from our experience as Caribbean people and whose responsibility it would be to interpret our laws having regard to that experience and being mindful of the actual expectations and standards of the people of the region.**
- F. by amending the existing Charter of Civil Society having solicited the views and contributions of CSOs within the region through an extensive and exhaustive process of consultation, and making it a requirement of the member states of CARICOM that the amended Charter be passed into Law in each state.**
- G. by making it mandatory that each member state pass into law an Integrity in Public Office Statute and an Anti-Corruption Code.**

### **3. Competitiveness and CSME:**

#### **Strategies Needed to Promote Global Competitiveness of Regional Firms**

3.1 Competitive advantage can be gained based on price and differentiation. Sandals Resort has successfully competed on both counts. The product is differentiated based on its unique Caribbean flavour. Focus and cooperation are two other elements on which we can compete – e.g. regional focus such as was applied to bananas could be applied to Sea Island cotton. It was noted that firms compete and not products. It was then suggested that people come together to form cooperative farms. The objective is to form horizontal linkage in the first instance and ultimately vertical linkages.

3.2 If regional firms are to compete based on price, then we must lower our operational costs. This can be accomplished through economies of scale and scope. Economies of scale are realized when fixed costs are spread over higher production levels, while economies of scope relate to an expansion of the range of products or services produced by a given asset. One way to achieve such economies of scale and scope is through mergers and acquisitions. Local success stories can be found in the examples of the ABIB/Swiss American Bank merger and the APUA PCS launch which saw APUA utilizing its existing telecommunications network to launch a profitable cellular phone service.

3.3 A benchmarking exercise should be conducted to prioritize commodities. Regional Transformation Programme has been doing just this – looking for commonalities and strengths. Seven commodities have been identified. Cotton is not included in this short list. This crop does best in the OECS and Barbados. It is one of the exportable products that could be grown in these territories and the value added component be done in one of the other territories.

3.4 It was pointed out that other countries are seeking to take advantage of the opportunity to infringe on the attractiveness of some uniquely Caribbean products. Specific reference was made of Japan's interest in Sea Island cotton. Rather than trying to prevent larger economies from infringing on the relative advantages that our commodities possess, should we look towards joint ventures as an alternative?

3.5 If we are going to be strong as a regional single market, we must develop a regional approach drawing on the distinctive competencies of the various territories. Therefore, the country that is best suited to cultivation may not be suited to the industrialized value added component of the process. The same principle can be applied to the manufacturing sector.

If local and regional firms are to differentiate their products and services, quality standards and certification must assume paramount importance. Consumers must have some objective means of comparing our goods and services to those offered by the competition. We must bear in mind that, in the era of trade liberalization, competition is not just local but also regional and international. Therefore, our standards and quality must be internationally competitive as the days of preferential treatment for substandard goods and services are no more.

3.6 Currency is a critical factor as the existing exchange rates result in lower operating/production costs in some territories.

### **3.7 Recommendations:**

- Identify specific products/commodities that have unique attributes that would make them competitive in the global market. The strategy would be to pursue niche markets. We must patent the genetic material for those elements that make our products unique and desirable. Specific examples include hot peppers, Sea Island cotton, Antigua Black Pineapple.
- **\*\*Pursue both horizontal and later vertical integration of firms with an emphasis on adding value to the product. For example, initially market the raw material but then move towards processing the product with the ultimate objective of marketing finished product. This would enable us to keep the value in the region.**
- **\*\*Industries should be allocated to specific territories based on their individual strengths.**

### **Access to Capital**

3.8 Liquidity must be channeled into productive capacity rather than simply saving it. With the advent of the Eastern Caribbean Securities Exchange, businesses now have the option to have their stocks traded publicly thereby raising much needed capital.

**3.9 **\*\*International capital that is accessed by governments should be filtered down to individual companies.****

**3.10 **\*\*Businesses could benefit from consultants who assist them in deciphering the requirements of financiers. Such assistance would enable companies to more effectively access capital.****

**3.11 **\*\*Encourage banks to have a more proactive interest rate policies – charge better interest rates for long-term developments.****

### **Attracting Foreign Capital**

3.12 Both the government and the private sector should seek to emphasize the relative strengths of the Caribbean as an investment opportunity. These strengths include the

presence of an English-speaking workforce, easy access to both North America and Europe, generally high literacy rates, high safety rating, political stability etc.

**3.13 \*\*Cooperatives in developed countries can also be explored as an alternative source of external funding. Governments have a tendency to interfere and prevent such alliances unless there is some governmental involvement. Government must create an enabling environment for such initiatives. Rather than being a market player in and of itself, Governments should seek to assume the role of enablers.**

### **Measures That Can Be Taken By Governments, Private Sector & Labour**

**3.14 \*\*National consultations must precede the development of policy and strategic plans. In this way the business community can develop corporate strategies that are consistent with the national & regional policy.**

### **Constraints to the Freedom of Movement**

3.15 Effective intra-regional transportation – both by air and by sea - is critical to the implementation of the CSME. It may be necessary to subsidize this service in the first instance. This is an essential service, and such subsidies can be rationalized.

3.16 The operation of our port poses a severe impediment. There is a lack of efficiency and resulting high costs. Unless this is addressed, the cost of goods will not be reduced.

3.17 The establishment of the Single Market is also hampered by existing statutory provisions that militate against these objectives. For example, all CARICOM territories have alien land holding restrictions in one form or the other. These statutes deem non-nationals aliens and restrict their ability to readily own property and hence the ability to establish business. Work permit requirements have a similar restrictive effect.

3.18 The media – radio and television - have a critical role to play in creating a “oneness” within CARICOM. The private sector on a regional level must take the initiative in establishing a CARICOM-wide radio and television network to cover news and current events throughout the region. The proposed CARICOM media would provide instant access to markets and information from Jamaica to Belize.

#### 4. Culture and the CSME:

**4.1 *\*\*The CSME needs to have a Cultural focus strategy that asks the following questions: A. Does this initiative empower people? B. Does it engender national pride?, C. Does it deepen commitment to community and homeland? D. does it enhance the creativity of the region? This strategy should be all encompassing in that it embraces and synthesizes the characteristics of both the political and the economic putting the CSME in a developmental context inextricably bound to the social and the political realities of the region.***

4.2 A major thrust of our Cultural development as we move towards deeper integration is the development of the creative imagination or the creativity of regional peoples. It must be noted that the regional Cultural Policy calls for the need ‘to develop the creative imagination not only for artistic interests but problem-solving in general’. It further states that we nourish ‘the orientation to creativity, self reliance and self-realization’.

4.3 As we plan for the way forward we need to note that it is a peoples’ creativity and not their arts which is their most potent liberating force. You may express creativity through the arts but you also do it in struggle, organization, teaching and preaching-in all human activities aimed at liberation. Therefore we need to consider:

- The allocation of major resources at affecting the creativity or creativeness of the whole society and not only towards the technical development of artists.
- The creation and sustainability of programmes and institutions that promotes creativity as the basis for building self-confidence and sharpening the resolves to meet our development challenges with new and fresh enthusiasm.
- The plans and process that empower people and liberate them to their creativity and self development.

4.4 We need to recognize and own cultural artefacts – pan, Antigua Black pineapple, herbs, etc. Music is a unifying force in the region. We need to feel pride in what is ours. We need to find creative ways of preserving and protecting these cultural artefacts, since we are fast losing revenue and identity to international countries. We must market our cultural /entertainment / hospitality industries (music, foods, dress, etc.) – source of capital. Music and other forms of cultural expression must be in our schools, hotels, and at every major function in the region. Identify and promote products and services on their strengths (unique selling positions) – e.g: honey, pineapple

**4.5 *\*\*Can cultural industries contribute to the development and widening of the CSME? Yes. Alternative medicine is a concrete example. Music and the performing arts are further examples. We also have certain unique products – e.g. Antiguan honey (which is considered to be the only honey in the region that is ‘disease free’).***

4.6 We need to patent our material so that it is not “stolen”. We also need to develop our copyright legislation.

4.7 Collective memories of the region should be documented – production of pharmaceutical “remedies” for the region – e.g.: plants from Antigua mixed with herbs from Dominica and St. Lucia could result in medical breakthroughs – scientific analysis of indigenous products.

4.8 Education is key – efficiency and effective production of various industries must be mandated, and our people must make sacrifices to get us out of the starting blocks – we must understand the need to perhaps buy Caribbean in spite of the price in order to raise capital to allow us to effectively compete on the global market.

**4.9 *\*\*We must think of ourselves as Caribbean people first – not Antiguan, or Barbadian or Dominican.***

4.10 Copyrights / intellectual property rights laws must be introduced and mandated regionally. Organizations which champion these enactments must be supported and financed.

4.11 Scientific and innovative means of documenting what we have. E.g.: secret ingredient in pineapple; establishment of a “model village” (old-time village). Sustainability of such vehicles of expression as dialect / language; Heritage Display; arts festivals, etc., is essential for the viability of our culture. Documentation of region’s contributions to and impacts on the international arena is critical to ownership.

4.12 Means of exposing our youth to all aspects of culture to ensure continuity through the generations.