

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, the notion of civil society is gaining increased acceptance. In order to create a space for participation from this sector, CARICOM Secretariat is convening national consultations in each member state.

The Association of National Development Agencies (ANDA), The Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR), and the Government of Belize, held a national CARICOM/Civil Society Consultation. The forum was held at Biltmore Hotel on the 5th day of September, 2001.

The national consultations in each member state shared the vision of a broad based exchange with government, labor, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other members of the community who might have innovative ideas on the way forward in Caribbean Development.

The specific objectives of the conference were:

- To identify strategies for Belizean development that takes into account the needs of the poor and marginalized groups.
- To establish new approaches to collaboration and consultation between civil society and government on development issues particularly in pursuit of the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME).
- To strengthen the scope of dialogue and collaboration among the various strands of Non-State Actors in promoting regional development.

This report summarizes the proceedings of the forum. It gives an essence of the opening ceremony followed by the group work. The list of participants, and material used during the day are included in the Appendix.

OPENING SESSION

The forum commenced at 9:30 a.m. with the facilitator Shaun Finnetty giving a brief introduction to the conference. Father Flowers followed with an invocation that included prayers for a successful day of negotiations.

The welcome address was given by Executive Director of SPEAR and board member of ANDA, Mervin Lambey. Mr. Lambey recognized the Caribbean Community for improving mechanisms for greater people inclusion and participation through the incorporation of civil society into its decision making process. He continued to emphasize the important role of civil society and the need to facilitate consultations as a means of exploring issues impacting the future of Belize, particularly globalization.

CARICOM Assistant Secretary General Dr. Edward Greene presented an overview and background to the consultation. Within the CARICOM Single Market Economy (CSME) process of discussions, the Heads of Government mandated the consultations with civil society.

He continued to explain that civil society needs to examine their role within development of the region and their country and attempt to establish mechanisms to promote this. Dr. Green continued to note the vision of development needs to be inclusive in order to make the Caribbean more viable and competitive, invest in human capital with equity, improve human resources capabilities, provide for culture preservation and upliftment.

Honorable Dolores Balderamos Garcia from the Ministry of Human Development, Women and Youth proceeded to discuss the challenges that confront Belize in the 21st century and realizing that it is truly essential to include all people within the decision making process. She emphasized the need for increased dialogue between government and civil society. The key to strengthen the region's capacity at international levels is for increased collaboration between civil society and the government.

PRESENTATION OF GROUP FACILITATORS

Highlighting the Way Forward

The following session of the consultation was addressed by the group facilitators provided their opinion highlighting the way forward in Caribbean Development. Mrs. Lourdes Smith, President of the Belize Business Bureau, emphasized the need for unity and focused action. Ms. Anita Zetina, Director of Women's Department, Ministry of Human Development, and Women and Society, gave a brief background of the women's movement in Belize and accented the base necessity for education and training in a developing country. Mr. John Pinelo, President of the Belize National Teachers Union, reiterated earlier statements concerning the need to educate and train human resources. Shaun then opened the floor for comments. Participants expressed views concerning the methodology of collectively expressing views, increasing the level of participation, the need for increased public education and information dissemination and the need to develop human capacity. Another concern was the need to incorporate elderly persons within marginalized groups.

GROUP SESSION

Participants were grouped into three groups:

- Group One- Competitiveness and the CSME
- Group Two- Governance and Participation
- Group Three- Cross Cutting of Human Resources

GROUP ONE:

Competitiveness and the CSME

The key elements of a competitiveness strategy for the region should include an equitable framework in which the playing field is level. This would take in account the need for equal access to opportunities such as training, education, and labor. Specifically, focusing on training, there is a need for increased entrepreneur skills.

The region needs to assess the cost of business. In Belize, we have high interest rates and public utilities cost. High public utilities cost, resulting from monopolies in water, energy, and communications services, would also have to be addressed.

The next assessment would be to identify niche markets and explore those industries where there is a comparative advantage. For example, we could look at the pharmaceuticals or carbon market.

The member states need to increase measures of communication and cooperation in order to strengthen linkages and relationships. This enables a greater support network when looking at the region in an international context. This could be initiated by establishing relevant institutions and utilizing the existing ones. Perhaps this can be illustrated by identifying a specific person or office in each member country for CARICOM.

When looking exclusively at financial markets and how they can be restructured and developed as a means of improving enhanced support to the small businesses, the group again emphasized the need for greater capital formation within the region based on equal advantage. We need to develop appropriate structures as well as small businesses to help finance the region. Education would also play a key role here by offering financial management, sustainability and technical expertise.

A major point that was marked throughout all groups was the need for better governance that includes transparency and accountability. There has to be an equal access to business licenses and incentives, as well as standardized local and regional laws and they must be implemented effectively. For example, bribery needs to be condemned and punished to the fullest extent of the law. When looking at regional laws, there is a concern to arbitrate trade conflicts expeditiously and fairly.

Another common need was the education for private sector. This would focus on technical skills, International Business, local laws, information technology and social responsibility.

Other innovative measures that can be taken to attract foreign capital include a “one-stop clearing house” for investors. A participant gave the example of Jampro in Jamaica where foreign investors can go to take care of all their business needs i.e. registering and income taxes. All documentation should be available in one location. In Belize we have Beltraide, however this offers information about the business environment. It should provide all documentation for investment.

In order to strengthen capital formation countries need to take full advantage of the information technology. The Internet is a prime example where we could offer the sale of local products. More local businesses might benefit more through amalgamation where they could support each other and share human and financial resources.

Considering all the different sectors of society and the need to widen the productive base of the region it was agreed that the most important step was collaboration. Government, labor, private sector and civil society need to consolidate the process of social partnership. This step however needs to be accomplished both on a local and regional level. Belize is in a very strategic geographical location that could take part in both Central America and the Caribbean. An assessment needs to be done looking at the industries where the region has a comparative advantage. Within each member country, however, the local market would need to be strengthened as well. Countries need to identify areas of the economy that are self-sustaining, in example abstaining from the imports of food products and targeting agriculture and industry which can create foodstuffs that stay at home.

In conclusion, in order to overcome the regional constraints when focusing on business we need more education in the area of globalization. Globalization has already confronted Belize on different levels and there is a need to take advantage of our geographic local as a Central American and Caribbean Country. Within this context, there is a concern of working in collaboration with a level playing field where all countries have similar opportunities and a standardized and harmonious system of law. For example, there would be an exchange of information technology and training.

GROUP 2

JUSTICE AND GOVERNANCE

Group Two was asked to address a series of questions pertaining to both justice and governance with in the private and public sectors of a specific country. They focused on the need for increased participation in order to promote accountability and transparency in government. In Belize, there was consensus that the education system perpetuates a dependency or complacency culture that extends from colonialism. People need to start taking responsibility for their lives and reject conditioning involving handouts or bribes. This system also creates many barriers that contribute to the lack of motivation, cooperation and unity from the people including language, education and social barriers. Similar to group one, education was emphasized where we need to break free from the deterrents and implement a curriculum that will instill a sense of responsibility, teach all languages, leadership (role models), organizational behavior, cooperation, teamwork, entrepreneurial life skills, citizenship, social studies.

Education needs to start at the youngest age as well as the oldest with a concentration of an understanding of the system and how citizenship relates to this. There is a need for greater awareness of current events and basic data from government. The dissipation of information allows for a more empowered people where they can hold the politicians accountable and allow them to voice their concerns as well as enable them to utilize resources like NGO's and private sector.

GROUP 3:

Human Resource Development

The current challenges facing the education system in preparing the youth of the Caribbean for the 21st century is very similar to what the previous groups discussed. The children need to be in contact with more information technology, life skills, social studies and technical training. In order to maintain core cultural values, cultural classes like language, history and citizenship classes need to be accessible. For example, there was an emphasis on the need for education concerning HIV/AIDS, violence and Belizean identity.

There is an increased need for data collection and analysis as well as the dissemination of information in order to increase public awareness of beneficiaries and stakeholders. This could be created through the establishment of public broadcasting supported by donors and the community, which is not politically related.

The role of the university as well as other institutions, in the process of reform, could be enhanced by offering International programs as well as classes that pertain to the needs of Belize and the region. Universities also should collaborate with NGO's and the private sector to provide seminars and training for adult education as well as reeducating the labor force to seek new industries that will allow Belize to have a comparative advantage.

When creating and exploring the ideology of a new model of development is must be crucial to include every sector. It is important for active participation of women, youth, elderly, and marginalized groups in the decision making process. An example of collaboration would be to give local business incentives for investments for meaningful community development. There needs to be accountable and transparent mechanisms institute to deliver high quality, affordable, relevant and accessible health and education services.

PLENARY SESSION

The discussion was brought to final thoughts considering the participants' vision and strategies of Caribbean Development in the global system. Basically the ideology that must be explored is the evolution of the collaboration of economic growth and the human development. This model must be specific with a high level of participation from every sector emphasizing culture. We must be able to customize our own reality and in every step of this civil society would play a role in the design and implementation of all strategies.

CONCLUSION

It was quite suitable that this consultation took place during the month of September, Independence time. This is a time to reflect, remember struggles and rejoice freedom. Belize is a young country turning 20 years now. It is time for everyone to be involved to decide the fate of the country, civil society has naturally evolved from the people to fill in areas and complement Government.

Belize need to redefine the element that civil society will supply in this rapid period of development for both Belize and the remainder of the world. A diverse group that encompasses teachers, unions, farmers, non-governmental organizations, churches, and citizens at large, civil society cannot act as one voice, yet we must rise above our differences and find a common ground on major issues. How can we funnel the diversity of suggestions that arise from civil society sectors into one cohesive plan? What role will this play in the development of Belize? There is a need for new models of development that incorporate economic growth as well as an investment in people with equity. Remembering, that development can not be defined strictly by economics i.e. a rise in Gross National Product or per capita income, but instead must also factor in what we call freedoms of life, liberty, and education. Development as freedom, and development being measured by enhancing the freedoms, livelihood, and happiness of citizens of the state.

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