

GRENADA'S NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS ON THE CARICOM CHARTER OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Grenada convened two National Consultations on Civil Society, one in October 2001 and the other in January 2002. Participants were from a cross section of professional bodies, political parties, non-governmental organisations and other activists including the following.

Grenada Food and Nutrition Council; National Development Foundation; New Life Organization; Grenada National Organization of Women; National Initiative for Prolific Policy; Ministry of Youth Affairs; Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Gender and Family; Ministry of Health and the Environment; Friends of the Earth; Grenada Citizen and Small Business Advice; St. Andrew's Development Group; Grenada Human Rights Organization; National Democratic Congress; Grenada Legal Association and members of the general public. Regrettably, no Union or media persons participated.

An overview was given of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), as well as a synopsis of the role of Civil Society in the deepening of the Caribbean integration process.

Additionally, a brief background on the Consultation, as well as the need for civil society's involvement in any discussion was highlighted. The point was stressed that the 'Way Forward for the Caribbean Community,' needed the input of the groups in the community in order to incorporate those views into the discussions at the meeting to be convened in Barbados. Further, the adoption of the Charter of Civil Society of the Caribbean Community was considered as part of the Way Forward. The impact of September 11 was also recalled and the Consultation was advised that as governments alone cannot solve the Region's problems the contribution of civil society was important.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Grenadians believed that the national consultation process should be ongoing. There was conviction that people must act for collective good and this must be accomplished through education campaigns.

RECOMMENDATION:

- That a process of information in the media and other avenues should be undertaken, but this needs to be both dependable and accountable.

CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY

Protocol II was viewed as adding free movement of people to selected categories only. The point was made that different standards of education existed in the Caribbean since some countries education systems were more advanced than others, resulting in unfair advantage for some nationals. Pertinent to this was the practice of each institution in the Region having its own accreditation scheme.

Clarification was given on the statements made in connection with Protocol II, implementing the CARICOM Single Market and Economy. Reference was made to heterogeneous nature of education levels, opportunities for development and other aspects of economic and social life among CARICOM member countries. The explanation was given that though Protocol II specified skilled labour, the Treaty encompassed all types.

Participants were informed that CARICOM member countries had accepted that accreditation boards were necessary, as well as equality of education B one curriculum, one exam, the same training, and acceptability only, of uniformity in qualification. The term industry was viewed as inappropriate for countries such as Grenada. Consequently, an explanation was given that the provision of services in itself is an industry, therefore, the term must be considered widely.

It was evident that fear existed about the free movement of people, particularly with regard to other nationals coming to Grenada to secure jobs and purchase land. Subsequent to this civil society was advised that the mass movement of people to secure jobs was unlikely to be a reality. An example was cited of the European Union, where only small percentage of persons actually moved from one state to the other, for settling purposes. An opinion was offered that the movement of persons would not be a detriment to Grenada, but, ought to be viewed as a service industry encouraging a nation's populace to be well-educated.

On the issue of export trade, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago were considered as the Caribbean countries with significant export trade and that they needed a mechanism to identify the most lucrative markets for CARICOM countries. It was believed that there would be constraints on SME goods from the other countries in the Region.

In terms of agriculture, most markets were seen as mono markets for the ECES bananas. Demand in the metro areas should, therefore, be well researched and better utilized.

On the removal of alien land-holding restrictions extending to the purchase of land, an inquiry was made about the verification of land use. Two issues were then highlighted: 1) That it is the responsibility of Government to ensure access to land, and 2) the question of whether Grenada now has a land policy in place to deal with such issues, and the significance of having one.

Participants felt that in Grenada, today, agricultural land is now rapidly being converted to residential holdings and it implied a threat to food security. There was some discussions as to whether Grenada had a Land Use Policy and it was recommended that this period was an opportune time for the establishment of such a policy. The fear was, if restrictions regarding access to land were removed, it would negatively impact on the availability of land as a resource, nationally.

Additionally, it was felt that there was a certain degree of lack of information on the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), regarding the removal of restrictions in a reciprocal manner. The need for more public consultations was highlighted.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Civil society promoted the establishment of a federal certificate to foster easier movement of labour.
- A strategy should be devised for CARICOM states to produce high quality fruits to enable the countries to capture niche markets.
- Another recommendation offered was the need to design an Industrial Policy. A single market industrial policy is needed for a Single Market and Economy.
- It was recommended, further, that: - 1) Grenada should ask for additional time for the removal of restrictions on the purchase of land, and 2) that a submission be made to Government regarding the establishment of a land use policy prior to the removal of restrictions.

CIVIL SOCIETY CHARTER

Comments were offered on 'Civil Society Charter'.

Article 1 of the Civil Society Charter was discussed and the Charter was seen as an excellent document that could bring colossal benefits if implemented.

While applauding the comprehensive text of the document, the issue of implementation of Article 14 was raised. An appeal was made for the Charter to be very widely disseminated.

Nevertheless, it was felt that the Caribbean was not mature enough, as a society, to implement the Charter in its entirety.

Clarification was offered by a panelist that the World Bank theory indicated that strengthening of democracy should rely on transparency and accountability.

Those present articulated the need for a clearer definition of Civil Society. The contents of the 'Charter' were said to repeat the Constitution. Instead it should be linked to international Conventions.

RECOMMENDATION :

- Accordingly, there was a call for deliberate formal education on the role of civil society.
- Transparency and integrity in Government were two critical needs identified. Further, a call was made for the Churches, in particular, to take a more leading role in terms of the participatory structure of society.
- A redefinition of the focus was seen as important. This should include ways of strengthening the linkage between government, rather than the current thrust of seeking to maintain a distinction between civil society and the other institutions of the State. Subsequently, a system of local Government was proposed to coordinate this structure.

MORE EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION - GOVERNMENTS-CIVIL SOCIETY

Governments were viewed as indifferent to civil society since they do not take the advice of Civil Society and does not follow-up with consultations. This was associated with a widening gap between the two - government and Civil Society - and it was seen as not conducive to adequate development. A Civil Society meeting, some years ago, in Trinidad, was recalled when civil society conveyed similar concerns.

Government's initiative in their interaction with the community was, however, applauded though the question of how to get governments to listen and follow-up was posed for consideration.

The recommendations from the 1993 Time for Action Report was recalled as well as a reminder that the current Consultation was, in part, a follow-up to that report. Further, the 1990 Tripartite Conference in Trinidad was considered ineffective because civil society was confrontational as a result of not being adequately incorporated into the system. These present Consultations were proffered as follow-up aimed at addressing better cooperation between the two groupings. Reference was also made to the emphasis now being placed on civil society in FTAA and WTO negotiations, especially in the protection of labour.

Questions again arose about civil society. Government's representatives noted the importance of Civil Society in Caribbean affairs and reiterated that the World Bank and United Nations Agencies sometimes stipulated such involvement.

A further concern was articulated regarding the level of cooperation among Groups within civil society. Cooperation was said to be at a low level and was probably one reason why civil society was not sufficiently effective. It was believed that cooperation was affected by political affiliation. A possible solution was greater transparency that could be achieved through partnership with the aspects of civil society.

Assessment as to whether the agenda for discussion was drawn up in favour of government's policies was a concern addressed. The Chairperson contributed that this could be a real concern and that it was up to civil society to set their agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In terms of participation, it was suggested that there be a clear link between this medium with CARICOM and the multipartite approach now adopted by government to incorporate community concerns in issues. Therefore, the concept of transparency would be ineffectively incorporated in development endeavour.
- A proposal was made for the consultations to be ongoing.
- Further, it was suggested that civil society should be included as participants in the CARICOM meetings to input from them.

POVERTY REDUCTION

The participants' attention was drawn to the issue of poverty reduction, which was claimed to be high on the agenda of most international and regional bodies. Proposals or solutions for dealing with the problem were called for. A definite link between poverty and lack of education was made, thus opportunities for education advancement ought to be increased. Of noteworthy mention, was the need for governments to pay special attention to areas of abject poverty.

To this end, human resource development must include not simply academic education, but additionally, skills training, as well as, efficient utilization of computers to teach basic education. One representative emphasized that it was better to have an educated nation with no jobs so that as the jobs arose, they would be ready for them, rather than an uneducated nation with jobs. Access to the jobs would be denied anyway, and further attempts to access other jobs could be denied because of lack of qualifications.

Finally, education was considered in a broader sense beyond an institutional setting, the informal aspect of it was promoted as a strategy for poverty reduction.

RECOMMENDATION:

- That increased attention needs to be given to poverty stricken areas.
- A strategy to use education as a tool to alleviate poverty should be devised.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social development was recognized as being critical to the advancement of the Region. It was, therefore, perceived that major focus should be placed on this area.

Education was promoted as critical throughout the second consultation and was linked to social development. This went beyond academic education.

Caribbean social value system was seen as restrictive in the scope of education. Reference was made to parental pressure on children for academic achievement while there was non-recognition of children's artistic or technical abilities. A consorted approach is, therefore, needed to raise the profile of technical institutions.

The importance of cognitive development in a child's education was considered under-emphasized in the Caribbean. Attention was drawn to the difficulties in learning that some young children faced. The preponderance of young mothers and the refusal to breastfeed was considered and a correlation was made between this lack and the difficulties some children had in learning.

Another significant area in need of corrective measures was the role of male partners and their lack of support within the structure of the family. Associated with this lack were many negative social issues.

The added issue of child labour was mentioned and it was seen as an issue worthy of considerable attention because of its growing practice.

Civil society, in Grenada, also addressed the matter of Rights of the Child. They refuted the official line that there was no child labour in Caribbean countries. In reality, children in the Region were viewed as being subjected to burdensome carrying and peddling goods. This was because of adverse social conditions. Again, the need for education was repeated. The Group proposed deliberate intervention to address this problem.

Concerns were raised about the increasing practice of men to abdicate their responsibility towards the family. It was felt that Caribbean men were not supportive with child rearing and finances and this trend needs to be reversed.

Grenadians were classified as needing more self-appreciation. Fundamental changes were viewed as critical in order to achieve "mental transformation".

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and civil society need to focus more on the family. It was believed that a "National Parenting Programme was required.
- The issue of men-at-risk ought to be placed on the national agenda and civil society could be more involved in efforts to address this issue.
- Community Development was linked to people's development. Civil Society, in Grenada thought it was threatened by Government. Accordingly, they recommended expanded community development that could eventually assist in nation building.
- Some identified a shift in government's focus away from the interest of the people to that of private business. More 'checks and balances', was viewed as necessary.

- A recommendation was also made for the development of a "National Master Plan" of five to ten years to address a change in mind-set. The starting point was identified as the schools and extended as far as guiding governments in the future.
- The establishment of a policy of 'Exclusive Breastfeeding in the first six (6) months of life' was proposed.

EDUCATION

Advice was offered for policy makers to broaden their scope, as remedial education was badly needed. Another profound change identified was a curriculum to encompass preparation for jobs. The St. Lucia's Model was mentioned as an excellent one to be adopted in other member states of CARICOM.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There was conviction that profound changes are needed to be made to school curricula, particularly that of Primary Schools. A more rounded education was viewed as compulsory. Additionally, more teachers are needed to overcome overcrowding and retraining should be done to improve reasoning skills.
- Participants referred to a deafening silence about the mode of education at primary level. Further education for life needed to be focussed upon.
- The reclassification of education was suggested. The new levels should be formal, informal and non-formal. Formal was associated with institutionalized academic study, while non-formal would be education with no set exams. Informal was defined as education by example.
- A proposal was made for the utilization of computers in schools and other institutions to educate unemployed people. It was viewed as a possible solution to other social problems.

INCREASED PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY

The aims and objectives of the proposed Civil Society Conference came under some scrutiny. Advice was offered that the Caribbean should determine and focus on its competitive edge. A paradox was said to exist. On the one hand Leaders were trying to achieve integration, while on the other hand segregation endures. The practice of countries competing in production of commodities where they lacked a competitive edge should be stopped. Those with expertise and resources should have to prioritise to produce accordingly. This was viewed as conducive to building the economies and could have a spin-off effect of attracting foreign capital. According to the Group, the Caribbean's economic survival record was not good.

The question arose about whether CARICOM was examining collaboration in manufacturing among member states. CSME was perceived as having elements of sacrifice, but it was felt that benefits could be derived. Linked to this were concerns about the currency difference and the efforts to address this. The Chairman advised that the issue was raised within CARICOM.

A lack of proactiveness by Caribbean Governments in negotiating internationally was cited as a contributor to the economic problems of the Region.

Disappointment in the RNM was articulated. It was felt that they have not fulfilled the mandate given to them and could serve the region better. At CARICOM level, the representation was needed by technocrats and civil society.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Aggressive, proactive pursuit in negotiating internationally.
- The establishment of a Regional Policy of specialization, by member states, in areas of industrial, manufacturing, tourism and services.

EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Civil Society Groups considered the Caribbean Education System as too oriental toward examinations. Of equal importance, they stressed, was self-esteem and personal development which needed to be highlighted even more than academics.

Linked to this weakness are false expectations regarding jobs. Alternately, some emphasis should be placed on personal obligation to create employment or engage in self-employment. Civil society in Grenada stressed the need to break the cycle of dependency on working for others.

Participants clamoured for increased communication. Reference was made to their input in the poverty studies from which no feed-back was given. Lack of communication was viewed as reducing civil society input into the process. In Grenada some organisations -*St. Andrews Development Organization (SADO)* and the *National Development Foundation* - are making significant inputs into the society and this went unrecognised.

OTHER POINTS RAISED

The limited capacity of the Region was discussed. Project allocations came under scrutiny. To this end, Governments should let civil society participate in discussions about the needs of the nation. It was felt that capital projects should be linked to the reduction of poverty.

RECOMMENDATION:

- A policy was needed to divert the population throughout the state and increase agriculture output.
- Further, debt relief should be a trade-off for programmes to help alleviate poverty as a means to effect meaningful change. Currently, the group believed there was little benefit for the poor and a social divide exists. Civil Society cannot operate in a vacuum and it needs to make an impact.
- Participants identified a major problem and posed the question "what can Civil Society do to hold government to the Charter? The lack of opposition, in a few countries, was seen as putting some states in a peculiar position. Concern was raised about who will hold government responsible for the Articles of the Charter.
- Environmental issues were said to receive little attention in the Caribbean. It should be more clearly articulated.

CONCLUSION

Reference was made to previous consultations held and the subsequent reports produced. Members of Civil Society expressed concern that this was another report that would be shelved.

By and large, participants at the Consultation raised substantive issues, some of which ought to be addressed. There was one disappointment, however, the response from Civil Society fell below expectation. Nonetheless, persons who attended showed enthusiasm and wanted more opportunities for integral involvement in the issue of civil society.

**ST. GEORGE'S
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