

## YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

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Those who have read the tourist brochures or looked at the films sometimes come to regard the Caribbean as an area of eternal bliss in which the sun shines all the time, a lot of rum flows and calypsoes fill the air. It is not quite like that. The Caribbean happens to be a real place. It doesn't only exist in pictures or on calypso records, with its only product steel bands. I hasten to assure you that is a very different kind of area from the one portrayed in that way.

It is indeed an interesting area, partly because historically it found itself with people drawn from many parts of the world. There are people in the Caribbean who look like me, most of whose ancestors went from India to plant and cut sugar cane. There are people of African stock who were brought over in the days of slavery. We have Chinese, Jews, Japanese-people of every creed, race and religion.

In some ways it stands in striking contrast to Asia and also to Africa. Guyana, which was originally British Guiana, and which in fact is on the South American continent, (the only part of South America which was a British colony), is distinct from the rest of the Commonwealth Caribbean. Guyana has over 700,000 people on an enormous land mass, most of which is virgin territory - as yet unexplored. But apart from Guyana the rest of the people in the English-speaking Caribbean come to no more than about 4 million in all. So we are really "small fry", compared, if you like, with Commonwealth Africa where you are talking about 120 million, or Asia and the Pacific with some 700 million.

The islands are mostly heavily populated, although there is great disparity in the density of the population. In Barbados, for example, which has only about 160 square miles, there is a population density of something like 1,500 per square mile; in a place like Dominica, which is very mountainous, it is about 235 per square mile. Montserrat, which still happens to be a British colony, has been recorded as having 32 square miles but

according to information I have received over the last six months it is now 34 square miles. Perhaps it was measured when the tide was out !

What I would like you to realise is that the Commonwealth Caribbean is a series of islands set in the Caribbean sea, between North and South America. Partly as a result of its history, the general standard of education, certainly at primary and secondary level, is relatively high. There is not much illiteracy. Formal education is reasonably good. There was no university until 1948, so that people of my generation had that kind of experience outside of the West Indies. This raises a very important point which I should make at once. There is a kind of inverted snobbery now developing in some parts of the developing world. The fact that I went to university in Britain ten years ago might have been a good thing, but now that the new countries are establishing their own universities people are saying that if you haven't been educated in the home soil you cannot really understand local issues. This attitude, I think, also has relevance to a place like Malta, because one may want to examine at a certain stage whether in small communities like yours there is a need for some people - not necessarily a large number of people - to move a bit farther away and get wider experience. To be home-grown is one thing: to be blinkered is another!

I think I ought to say that the Caribbean is essentially a young people's region - 62% of the population is under 25. Nearly all children have access to primary education but, unlike Africa, there are not large land masses, there are no extensive farms, so that if a young man doesn't quite "make the grade", as they say, there is no point telling him to go back to the farm because there is no farm to go back to; he did not come from the farm in the first place.

Although I am now dealing with the Caribbean I should like, too, to draw attention to one or two issues of a general kind based on my experience in that part of the world. It is terribly important for all of us to think hard about some of these issues. So many of us are reading the same books, talking to the same people and meeting the same kinds of experts, that we may be coming to perceive certain problems which appear similar or identical. This is quite dangerous. I would encourage you, especially the young people, to take the issues and analyse them very carefully in the light of local circumstances. For example, it soon became clear in the Caribbean Seminar that when we

began to talk about unemployment and people leaving school and not being able to find work, some of the experts, the consultants, those who wear badges like mine, said: "Let them go back to the land; agriculture is the answer." I remember that at the seminar, about half way through, this question was put. "Is there no possibility of creating employment for these young people by turning to the sea?" It had not occurred to many of them that they were dealing with island communities, in the waters around which foreign trawlers were catching prawns and lobsters and sending them back again in cans for sale! The only solution they knew to the unemployment problem was "Back to the land", but there is no land to go back to. Even if some more of the land was to be used to produce more sugar, and then on the world market the prices slump, what have we achieved? We have probably kept more people cutting cane and processing it but that is about all.

I hope I have said enough to give you some sort of feel for the area. I should like in the next few minutes to deal with specific outcomes from the Caribbean Seminar.

One of the main things that emerged from the seminar was that traditional occupations were unacceptable to young people even though they could not see any alternatives. It is important to remember that you may tell the chap to go back and do a bit of craft work or fishing and so on, but he does not want to do such things. He cannot see what else there is to do, but his aspirations are fixed on the mountain tops. Meanwhile his extended family looks after him. If he does not earn money he can always go and pick a few fruits from somebody's garden. The social pressures on him are of a different order. If he doesn't want to work, he will not work, yet he will not starve.

There is also in the Caribbean the question of what is called "incomplete families". In the 1950's many people left the colonies (as they then were) and went to Britain because the streets were paved with gold. The men were getting on banana boats leaving the women behind. One of the consequences of this period is that in some families there was no head, no father figure. The implications for young people growing up did not become clear until much later.

Another matter that emerged from the seminar by way of problems and needs was a kind of new class-consciousness, whereby those who were selected for secondary schools and later went to university came to see themselves in truly elitist terms and had little contact with their peers who missed the

conveyor belt.

The terms 'rural' and 'urban' and the differences associated with this categorisation produced problems in the Caribbean Seminar as they may also do here. When one speaks about 'rural' in the African context, for example, this is understandable, but when you speak about 'rural' in the case of Barbados or Tobago you may really be talking about a twenty minute ride from the heart of a bustling city.

Nevertheless, the question of people leaving the so-called rural areas and squatting around the main cities creates new kinds of problems. Some young people prefer to come into the city and to hold their hands out than to stay on the estate and till the land. And when you get to a place like the Bahamas it can be even worse. Some school-leavers are finding it more worth their while "to use their hands"; one to carry a suitcase and one to hold out, than to stay at school, because of the large numbers of American tourists who visit that part of the world.

Another thing that emerged was that there seemed to have been a fetish, partly because of colonial traditions, for buildings and institutions which were decorative, ornamental and massive. There was a lack of appreciation of the desirability of utilising the resources of the community, of building schools using ordinary local wood, local galvanised roofing and so on. In addition it was evident that if you built something for a certain purpose you shouldn't use it for anything else. You could have a community centre right next to a school or next to a church. The school could be over-crowded, while the church remained empty for much of the time and the community centre came alive only at night. Young people in these communities have begun to open their eyes and question some of these practices under the banner of "social justice".

Governments have been under pressure and in some cases there has been a breakdown of discipline, failing communication between youth and the establishment, and fewer job opportunities. In the face of this Governments began to seek quick solutions. Some decided that the answer lay in setting up youth camps and in some of the islands youth camps were established to cater for the 16-18 year olds. In the camps young people pursued basic skills over two years, but the camps cost money. At best they are only a short term measure and their effects are only minimal on the real problems.

In the Caribbean then, people are re-thinking completely the part which youth can play in the development of their societies. This is being done with imagination and vigour. Despite the enormous difficulties some progress is being made and there has begun to emerge the new Caribbean man, not unaffected by his history but not enslaved by it either. It is this kind of being that today's youth seeks to become.