

The Way Forward For The Caribbean As A Region

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Let us admit the fact that as individual islands and certainly in the case of Jamaica, if we continue down our current insular path of Governance and Economic Under-Development we will not survive as a sustainable society.

Norman Manley and those who proposed a Federation as the path to sustainable development were correct over 50 years ago and the concept seriously needs revisiting.

If that opening salvo has not got your attention then here are some simple facts:

1. Sun Sea and Sand are at the centre of our economies in terms of Tourism for the majority of the Islands but instead of nurturing the rare beauty and fabulous environs, which make us so attractive our approach to development is slash and burn then landscape and we even import flora and fauna from outside the region to landscape.

2. Energy except for Trinidad and Tobago that have utilized the oil they discovered to subsidize development, is a very high cost input into our operations of business reaching a rate of almost US\$.40 in some islands when our cheapest source of energy, the SUN is the first that we recognize for tourism but we fail to utilize for energy. The entire region needs to liberalize the energy sector to allow the use of the natural sun, sea (wave energy) and wind to become the main sources of energy, which will be the least polluting of our beautiful environment.

3. Caribbean Culture, which includes our music, food, rhythm, dance, theatre, and essentially our warm and captivating personality as a people must be as central as sun sea and sand to our Tourism product and in fact is what separates us from the rest of the world as a region. There are so many people of the world, who would love to be able to talk, walk, run, dance and generally have a lifestyle like us but we do not fully appreciate and understand the value of what we have. Our entire focus especially regarding Tourism must put our culture on par with our sun, sea and sand in terms of developing and sustaining our competitive edge in tourism.

4. Our Natural Environment must be regarded as sacrosanct and we must preserve and protect it with every ounce of our strength. Man in harmony with nature, which is at the core of why we love our region and because it is so fabulous we invite the rest of the world to visit us to share our natural beauty, is what separates us from other regions. Why are we so hell bent on

destroying our own beautiful islands if we seriously recognize this fact or is it that we are totally undereducated and really are intent on destroying the very reason why we love what we have? Our entire approach to development and planning for future survival must put the natural environment and its protection front and centre.

5.Sustainable Economic Development must be approached as a long-term regional philosophy and we must have regional policies, which support the concept. Our spices, rum, and regional delicacies must be developed as Caribbean brands which though they may have the unique flavor of our individual islands really must be within the context of regional policies, which encourage and support our development.

Clearly the short-term approach of our regional governments whose horizon is on winning elections every four to five years is really backward and is often detrimental to sustainable economic development as "spending "to win an election is usually more important than the bigger picture longer term approach.

This is not at this stage intended to be a comprehensive dissertation but I have just touched on one or two items, which are intended to begin a serious discussion of the way forward for the Caribbean as a region.

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