

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

UNESCO, Paris, 5 – 9 October 1998

VOLUME V – PLENARY

Dominica

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Dominica

**Speech of Hon. Ronald Green
Minister of Education, Sports and Youth**

Focus on the Caribbean

Blending the colours to enrich the pattern: community participation for strengthening democracy.

Every Caribbean state participating in today's exercise has within its territorial boundaries the formal institutions, political behaviours and cultural norms associated with democratic governances.

The oft imposing legislature buildings are present, the bureaucratic machinery of general elections grinds, the political parties hold sway. Of course, democratic governance, like any other facet of life introduced to the region, has not escaped the imprint of Caribbean creative intellect and Caribbean creative imagination. For the benefit of my non-Caribbean listeners, let me simply say that an electioneering campaign in any

Caribbean country defies description. It is an incomparably unique and heady experience.

As we approach the new millennium, however the region has begun, once again, a process of introspection. What kind of people, for what kind of Caribbean? In 1997, the CARICOM Heads of Government meeting in Jamaica ratified a Human Resource Development Strategy for the region which, outlined the characteristics of the ideal Caribbean person. The 21st century Caribbean person, the document states, should be someone who among other things:

- is imbued with a respect for human life
- is emotionally secure with a high level of self confidence and self esteem
- is aware of the importance of living in harmony with the environment
- has a strong appreciation of family values, community cohesion and moral issues
- has an informed respect for our cultural heritage
- nourishes in self and in others the fullest development of each person's potential without gender stereotyping and embraces differences and similarities between females and males as a source of mutual strength.

We look to the emergence of a Caribbean society firmly anchored upon the principles of equality and solidarity, a society where citizens can conduct their affairs -in an atmosphere of harmonious living, where citizens by their self-confidence and self-reliance can propel the region into the 21st century.

Translating that vision into reality has now become a matter of urgency, for democratic governance in the Caribbean region has come under threat. The negative impact of globalization and economic liberalization upon our fledgling micro vulnerable island economies sometimes undermines voter confidence in the effectiveness of the political system and in the capacity of governments to perform. Voter malaise and growing cynicism among the young cannot be ignored. A second and related threat is the increased vulnerability of Caribbean States to the insidious activities of the drug cartels operating in and around the region. Yet another factor is the withdrawal of significant segments of societies -women and youth in particular - from active participation in the democratic process, sometimes before, but certainly once the electioneering period comes to an end. Democracy cannot flourish if citizens curtail their right as citizens to only marking a ballot on Election Day. Promoting and nurturing activecommunity participation in the democratic process will allow for the diversity and infinite variety by which the universe itself is characterized. An abundance of ideas is so essential in preparing to construct the future, if only to limit the danger of too narrow a view-point. The more varied and numerous the elements in the creative process, the richer the texture of the product.

Within the context of the special project which we present today to UNESCO for consideration, community participation is placed within a triangular relationship with democracy and development. As political leaders, our goal is to embark upon the sort of developmental programmes which place our people at the core of the process. Our goal is not simply to report increased GDP and per capita income. We are all aware how effectively reported figures can mask the kind of social and economic hoped, will facilitate the emergence of critical thinking skills that will enable Caribbean persons to understand and come to terms with their changing environment, to create new forms of knowledge by fusing the new knowledge into their own existing store, to make informed choices vis a vis goals and aspirations.

From "knowledge" to "know-how" for enhanced living is the maxim. Not just "learning to know" but also "learning to do", "Learning to be" and "learning to live together".

Educational programmes have often been criticized for disseminating information which is of little significance to societal requirements, to real life. In my country we express it thus: "L'éducation c'est pas l'esprit".

The literal translation of this Creole expression is "Education is not common-sense". To truly grasp the meaning however, one would need to go to a broader semantic interpretation such as "the individual who has amassed much knowledge from books and formal classroom experiences disparities which threaten the very existence of the democratic state. Development initiatives in the region must provide for reduction of poverty and elimination of hunger. Deriving from these initiatives must be opportunities for Caribbean persons to develop their creative talents to push the limits of their creature imagination. Above all, such initiatives must provide for all Caribbean persons particularly our indigenous peoples, to live in dignity as befits human beings. It is my view that enhancing opportunities for economic independence provides a mechanism for knitting all into the social fabric, for blending the colours to enrich the pattern.

The key to the kind of self-reliant and sustainable development which we seek in the region is greater access for our people to new forms of knowledge. Our goal is to breach all learning frontiers such as age, gender, linguistic grouping, ethnic grouping and geographical location. Our goal is to transform our societies into learning communities where old and young, men and women, "the schooled and the unschooled", rural folk and urban folk, will come face to face with new forms of knowledge via all the available media of transmission. Expanded access to new knowledge, it may not necessarily exhibit commonsense and make right decisions in his every day dealings".

We would certainly not wish to add to that group in the region.

In seeking to expand the horizons of knowledge in our communities, we would wish to introduce the new information against the backdrop of the accumulated wisdom of generations.

Against the backdrop of the accumulated images and experiences that are part of our living, some emanating from slavery, indentureship, resistance, survival revolution and more recently images like:

- George Padmore - Pan Africanism
- Marcus Garvey - Black Renaissance
- CLR Jones - Every Cook can govern
- Walter Rodney - Groundings with my Brothers
- Willie Demas - Economic good sense
- Michael Rudder - Solidarity with "Haiti I am sorry"
- Derek Walcott – Nobel Prize in Literature
- Brian Lara's – World Cricket record
- Maurice Bishop - New Jewel Revolution
- George Lamming - Cultural Sovereignty
- Phillip Potter - Africa Liberation struggles support
- Jean Aristides – Ansamn, Ansamn Nou se Lavalas
- Bob Marley - "Get up, stand up" reggae wails

We have selected as the theme for this project: "Tapestry of the Past, fabric for the future". In our historical cultural and social antecedents lie rich motifs, rich images which can be woven once more into the new Caribbean design.

The emphasis on strengthening community participation in the democratic process is provided for in several areas of the special project. Page 3 outlines three focal areas and sixteen projects. I shall highlight those relating to strengthening community participation.

In Focal Area I _____ page 18

Project #1.3 Enhancing the Educational Experience and Improving the Performance of Young Males

Comment: Unlike the trend world in the South, our younger males are exhibiting signs of underachievement which must be researched, examined and dealt with.

Still in Focal Area I - page 22

Project #1.7 Enhancing communities through continuing education

Comment: A healthy community fully aware of the tools and mechanisms of prevention and restoration engaged actively in its self-preservation, and self-healing is a fundamental asset. Work has started in dozens and dozens of our communities and must be deepened so as to provide the right environment for generations ahead.

In Focal Area 2 - page 24

Project #2.1 Interactive instruction for strengthening and popularizing of science and technology

Comment: I would like to point out that the national/regional and indeed community science fairs and camps proposed are critical for breaking with superstition, mysticism and cultism which can be major impediments to community strengthening.

Focal Area 2 – page 26

Project #2.2 Managing Diversity

Comment: A major strength could be a key weakness without dialogue - exchange activities that focus on participation in a new Caribbean. Often creative embryonic projects at community level starve from lack of support creating frustration, alienation and resort to substance abuse. Peace grows from productive activity both cultural and practical.

Focal Area 2 – page 27

Project # 2.3 Creating and sustaining Peace Space

Comment: The generation and promotion of positive images and fending off the negatives that permeate and weaken those sectors (power exerters, powerless, groups, schools) must constantly be pursued.

Focal Area 2 - page 28

Project #2.4 Promoting Cultural Industry and Cultural Heritage

Objective:

Comment: Our food, our herbs, our music are extremely important resources which have demonstrated economic potential above and beyond the psychological / confidence / esteem aspects. That awareness of culture and heritage at community level provides a central boost to the people's image of self.

The Boetica example

The experience of a small village in Dominica - Boetica (300) comes to mind. There a cultural group performing heritage dances with jing ping music (traditional) has inspired the village to new heights of self-confidence.

Focal Area 3 - page 30

Project #3.2 Travelling exhibition – Tapestry of the Past, Fabric of the Future

Comment: Speaks for itself

Focal Area 3 - page 31

Project #3.3 Community- Information Centres in the Caribbean

Comment: Speaks for itself

Focal Area 3 - page 32

Project # 3.4 Creative thinking and innovation

Comments: This project reminds me of the Koulirou Group in my village Laplaine which were a group of youth who, through folkloric research with the community elders, collected materials and develop two plays "chemen letang" and "Riot" which chronicled the struggles for development and justice.

Conclusion: Thank you for your attention and patience.
Looking forward to your responses as we seek in dialogue to refine them . I commend these projects to you.

Thank you.