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## Caribbean Partnerships I: Economic Justice and Sustainability

Co-convened by Regions Refocus and  
Institute for Gender and Development Studies:  
Nita Barrow Unit, University of West Indies at Cave Hill  
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The first Caribbean Partnerships regional workshop, **Caribbean Partnerships for Economic Justice and Sustainability**, was convened by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies: Nita Barrow Unit (IGDS:NBU), University of West Indies (UWI) at Cave Hill, Barbados along with Regions Refocus. Held 6-7 January 2015, this workshop brought together forty representatives of finance, economic affairs, planning, and gender ministries, regional organizations, UN agencies and international organizations, civil society, and academia, to build relationships and catalyze action towards progressive, gender-sensitive economic and environmental policy initiatives. Over the two days of the workshop, participants analyzed a range of economic and environmental issues related to Caribbean priorities surrounding sustainable development, including fiscal policy and planning; work, employment, and innovation; social protection and citizen security; environment and sustainability; and governance and accountability.

In the context of rapid onset climate change and precarious growth characterizing the period following the economic and financial crisis of 2007-8, participants engaged in detailed discussions and envisioned concrete recommendations around specific policies to improve human, ecological, and economic wellbeing in the Caribbean. The workshop illustrated and contested the narrative of the “new global normal,” exemplified by IMF Director Christine Lagarde, who encouraged the Caribbean to adjust and to undertake innovative measures including a Citizenship-by-Investment program. Referring instead to

the “new global abnormal,” CARICOM’s Rosina Wiltshire described jobless growth, increasing poverty and inequality, growing rates of violence including gender-based violence, concerns of environmental degradation and scarcity. Mariama Williams of South Centre highlighted that current global trajectories will lead to catastrophic levels of climate change, with a projected global temperature increase of 4-5 degrees Celsius, which has significant implications for the Caribbean if trends continue.

Added to the global economic and environmental dimensions of the “new global normal” are conditions specific to small island developing states (SIDS) and the Caribbean in particular. Don Marshall of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) at UWI Cave Hill described the “island paradox” whereby the contributions to Caribbean economies of tourism and offshore financial services have led to a level of prosperity just high enough to preempt concessionary financing while leaving SIDS vulnerable to shocks. Compounding this problem are increasing levels of narcotics trade and resulting criminality, illustrated Guyanese entrepreneur and activist Jocelyn Dow; as well as high rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), of crucial concern to the economies of the Caribbean. To address these regional and global conditions, Caribbean participants envisioned progressive policies and regional partnerships towards achieving regional and global objectives for sustainable development along with economic and gender justice and human rights.

### Gender Justice

Charmaine Crawford, head of IGDS:NBU, proposed an expansive notion of gender justice – one that takes into consideration how gender intersects with class, employment status, age, the environment, and citizen security in determining how individuals are equipped to secure their own livelihoods and enable opportunities for a better quality of life. A recent tendency in the region to exclude LGBT rights from the gender and women’s rights agendas was highly criticized both by Richie Maitland, from Groundation Grenada, and Michele Irving, from Productive Organisation for Women in Action. Richie evinced the falsity of the distinction between LGBT and gender issues, explaining the shared cause of objections to both LGBT and women’s rights as rooted in a perception of supposed transgression of gender norms.

### Economic Justice

Economic justice includes the voice and participation of all citizens; economic rights, dignity, and security; and accountability and monitoring of fiscal, monetary, and trade policies to ensure an adequate level of social welfare and protection for all citizens. To advance economic justice in the Caribbean, participants asserted, the context, content, and process of managing economies has to change, to deconstruct old business models that idealize unrestrained growth while ignoring environmental costs and impacts. The language of development economics and economic governance must be strengthened, against the continued emphasis on foreign direct investment and a deliberate blindness regarding global structural inequalities that prevent adequate mobilization of domestic resources in global South countries.

In the face of extreme levels of sovereign debt in the region, participants analyzed potential ways forward for economic policy that balances an emphasis on growth and servicing debt on the one hand, and ensuring social and environmental progress on the other. As the average rate of debt in the Caribbean is 80%

of GDP (with Jamaica as high as 139% of GDP), most countries dedicate a large part of their budget towards debt repayments, as outlined by UWI economist Winston Moore. This shrinks the availability of resources directed towards social services while simultaneously prohibiting sufficient economic growth, a problematic cycle that Judith Wedderburn of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Institute for Law and Economics (ILE) framed as essential to address. Mariama recommended that civil society direct their advocacy towards encouraging a debt audit, to identify the nature and accumulation of debt over time and to explore possibilities for writing off or seeking cancellations for particular aspects of the debt. Articulating this regional priority at the global level with regard to the push for a sovereign debt workout mechanism at the United Nations also emerged as a recommendation to formulate Caribbean collective positions on debt.

Despite the significance of payments to service debt, both governmental and non-governmental participants positioned fiscal policy as an area where Caribbean governments do have some space to enact pro-development measures. Melissa Hippolyte of the Ministry of Finance of St. Lucia highlighted that Caribbean governments should target policies towards increasing the progressivity of tax structures and creating fiscal incentives towards environmental and social process. Rosalea Hamilton, founder of ILE, asserted that until fiscal decision-making is decentralized and inclusive of civil society, trade unions, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the unequal power structures that perpetuate economic problems in the Caribbean will continue.

Global questions of power and structures that limit the policy space and economic determination of Caribbean countries also featured in the discussions and recommendations at the workshop. Senator Jepter Ince of the Barbados Ministry of Finance called for a reformulation of trade

regulations, to amend global rule-setting that favors major trading countries to the detriment of economic policy and development in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

### Environmental Justice

Tying the concept of gender equality, participation, and access to information into the discussion, Adrian Cashman outlined the conception of environmental justice as a requisite underlying principle for regional policy-making towards sustainable development. Given that the target of 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature rise has potentially already passed, Adrian warned that the effects of climate change will likely affect the more vulnerable members of the population to a greater extent than others and that therefore equitable participation in policy making is essential.

Caribbean governments must address climate change and manage natural resources coherently with existing systems of measurement of economic performance, participants recommended. Providing an overview of climate finance in the Caribbean context, Mariama Williams explained that Caribbean governments should advocate for additional, adequate, appropriate, equitable, and predictable financing to mitigate and adapt to climate change, in accordance with the climate debt owed to Caribbean and other countries who suffer the damages without the benefits of rich countries' industrialization processes. Given the small percentages of climate finance currently being accessed by Caribbean countries, Mariama recommended increased attention and work in this sector by Caribbean governments and civil society organizations.

A series of proposals around renewable energy in the region emerged from the workshop. Participants discussed the requirements for the enabling framework of renewable energy policy to combat vested interests and governmental roadblocks preventing the facilitation of renewable energy

in the Caribbean. An energy system driven by renewables would transform a current constraint of the Caribbean – the cost of energy – into a competitive advantage, including for export and in attracting business, Winston Moore illustrated.

Rosina emphasized the importance of collective, rather than splintered, regional initiatives to acquire funding and promote renewable energy projects. Broader recommendations were articulated, including the need for national-level conversations to create institutional mechanisms to mainstream climate change into various policies, participation mechanisms, and specific attention to gender.

### Partnerships and Participatory Governance for Sustainable Development

Civil society and government representatives at Caribbean Partnerships I envisioned a broadened definition of partnerships, inclusive of small business as well as the NGO sector. Community groups, indigenous people, the elderly, people with disabilities, women's groups, and youth should be at the table, participants asserted, through meaningful spaces for interventions in the political system. Nadine Brown of the Planning Institute of Jamaica called for greater civil society participation in decision-making processes, to address the lack of confidence in government strategies that the region experiences.

The workshop outlined several citizen participation best practices, such as the creation of a charter for civil society; the development of local committees of civil society, government, churches, and other non-state actors working together to monitor, manage, and implement development plans; and the sanction of an access to information act. Melissa shared successful open data and participation initiatives undertaken in St. Lucia, such as participatory budgeting at the national level and an accountability mechanism by which the community

monitors the implementation of fiscal policy. Proposals for greater citizen participation were also contributed by civil society, including strengthening advocacy efforts with hard facts-based, evidence-based arguments; and engaging non-traditional actors in development processes through meaningful capacity building.

Governance and the political leadership required to usher in a truly sustainable and just future for the Caribbean region was emphasized throughout the workshop. Promoting access to data, including through observatories housed at Caribbean universities, was emphasized by participants along with a concrete recommendation to collaborate on a participatory audit of sustainable development initiatives by government and civil society. Participants suggested creating a mechanism of inclusive community monitoring of budgets, which could also track government commitments including to international conventions such as CEDAW. Rosalea introduced a new civil society initiative, Participatory Governance and Fiscal Policy Dialogue in the Caribbean (PGFFD), to “address the participation and confidence deficit” in fiscal policy by improving participatory governance and promoting the establishment of a platform for dialogue between citizens and their governments.

### Towards Structural Change for Justice in the Post-2015 Arena

In advancing regional integration, Senator Ince pointed to the Caribbean Growth Forum and the Caribbean Single Market and Economy as potential frameworks for partnerships to address the macroeconomic challenges caused by globalization: to increase economic leverage and effectiveness, expand trade business and economic relationships with other Caribbean and international countries, and strengthen capacity building within the region.

For a region that depends on the outcome intergovernmental processes including the UNFCCC and Financing for Development in particular, presence in political negotiations has not been significantly strong, participants illustrated. To avoid repeating an oft-cited mistake of the Millennium Development Goals: a lack of sufficient ownership in the regions and countries in which the goals were to be implemented, participants emphasized the need for the post-2015 process to become integrated into development planning in the Caribbean. A key factor in that domestication of international policy is political leadership at the regional level, including through rebuilding political savvy and influence of CARICOM in its previous iterations.

Civil society representation plays a key role in these efforts to bolster Caribbean participation in global spaces. The responsibilities of CPDC, as one of the most globally active networks and the sole representative of civil society with CARICOM, were emphasized by several participants; one suggested the creation of national bodies of CPDC, to build influence of the network and its members in intergovernmental spaces.

See also the Caribbean Partnerships webpage: <http://www.daghammarskjold.se/event/caribbean-partnerships-economic-justice-sustainability/>.