

**PRESENTATION TO THE MEETING OF CIVIL SOCIETY
COMMITTEES ADVISING THE INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT
BANK ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE JAMAICA CSAC**

Grand Sport Villa, Ocho Rios, Jamaica

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I am please to have been a member of the Civil Society Advisory Committee (CSAC) of the Jamaica Office of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) FROM ITS INCEPTION. Our membership reflects a wide spectrum of Jamaican civil society interests including the church, the environment sector, services to children, sustainable development, women's issues, youth issue, the elderly, urban development, rural development and poverty alleviation.

The first meeting took place on September 12, 2001. Our first task was to review and amend the Terms of Reference governing our operations. We agreed-and the Bank concurred-that our Mission Statement should be:

"To improve communication between the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Civil Society in Jamaica, so as to increase the contribution of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to Bank operations and institutionalize the Bank's CSO participation process"

We agreed on three objectives for the Jamaica IDB-CSAC:

- ◆ To improve channels of communication between the Bank and CSOs for the dissemination of information regarding the nature and scope of the Bank's operations and the scope of the bank's operations and the development concerns of civil society.
- ◆ To promote and adopt participatory mechanisms for increasing the level of contribution by CSOs to the development and implementation of development policy, sector strategies and programmes of the Bank and the preparation, execution and evaluation of projects.
- ◆ To institutionalize an effective, efficient, flexible and innovative system for sustaining this participative process of consultations with CSOs on the development issues of the country.

The Terms of Reference details a suite of activities which will constitute the work plan of the CSAC, as follows:

- ◆ Develop an annual Action Plan to implement the objectives of the CSAC
- ◆ Define the issues that should be the subject of discussion and consultation between the Bank and Civil Society
- ◆ Suggest and adopt innovative approaches for the involvement of CSOs in different stages of the Project Cycle, including the identification, design and evaluation of projects, with a special focus on the Bank's portfolio of pipeline projects
- ◆ Offer advice on aspects of the Bank's development policy and strategy and selected sector strategies and programmes.
- ◆ Provide inputs into the programming process by facilitating the distribution of information, analysis of development problems and identification of stakeholders

- ◆ Assist with the identification of organizations or individuals with expert knowledge of local conditions and the capacity for identification, design and execution of specific projects and programmes.
- ◆ Identify ways in which technical assistance can be channeled to strengthen the capacity of CSOs
- ◆ Review and assess strategies and approaches of the mainstreaming of key development areas of focus

The decision of the Governors of the Inter-American Development Bank to set up a process of consultation and dialogue with civil society is commendable and perceptive – even visionary! All too often, governments are found to be fleetingly or habitually distant from the needs, mood or temperaments of their people, and they apply for Bank funding of projects inappropriate either in concept or in method of execution. To place civil society representatives in a position to advise the Bank on the propriety, design, implementation and evaluation of specific projects in their country – as well as overall strategies and approaches – is a profound level of real empowerment and deepening of democracy. This throws the ball in the court of civil society to really play the role thrust upon them rather than complaining from the sidelines. This is a fundamentally principled process, and I personally fully support it.

In my view we here in Jamaica have been much preoccupied with making sure that the design of the consultative process is adequate rather than in actually trying to implement it, and then working out the details in praxis. In the two-and-a-half years of our existence the full CSAC has reviewed only two (2) bank projects (the “Citizens’ Security and Justice Project”, and the “Primary Education and Support Project”). Individual members have taken part in scoping workshops for two other projects (Youth, and Post-Secondary Education), and in a two-day Consultation to review three of the Bank’s social sector strategies (Poverty Reduction and Social Equity, Social Development, and Governance). At the same time we have reviewed a document entitled “Citizen participation in the Activities of the Inter-American Development Bank” and sent the comments to the headquarters of the Bank.

We have also spent quite a lot of time examining the process in the Caribbean and the wider Americas by which civil society might be consulted by governments or multilaterals in general. We have reviewed OAS and Caribbean Development Bank documents on civil society; we have reviewed documents and sent representatives to a CARICOM Regional Civil Society Consultation.

Over the last few months we have been entirely preoccupied with preparations for the input of Jamaica’s civil society into the Mauritius meeting (Barbados + 10) through the hiring of a consultant who has held three focus group meetings with CSOs across Jamaica, and the staging of a National CSO consultation just last month. In doing so we have become familiar with the details of the Barbados Plan of Action (BPOA) for Small Island Development States (SIDS) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

We have had our operations assessed by an external consultant contracted for that purpose. It was a four-pronged process: one was to assess the operations of the CSAC; another was to complete an earlier “Profile on Civil Society in Jamaica”; the third was the development of a “Comprehensive Strategy for Bank’s Engagement with Civil Society” after consultation with ourselves, the Bank and with CSOs attending focus groups in four different parts of Jamaica’ finally, this led to revision of the Terms of Reference of the CSAC.

The consultant has – correctly in my view – concluded that we have fallen short in our achievements, which may be the source of falloff and fallout in meeting attendance and committee membership. She said:

A significant amount of CSAC time was allocated to finalizing the group's TOR, discussing the CARICOM regional Civil Society Consultation "Forward Together" and reviewing two IDB-financed projects. CSAC members also responded to invitations to attend relevant events. However the amount of time spent by the Committee on the achievement of its stated objectives was minimal. The contributions of the Committee have been made by about seven of its total membership¹

Nevertheless, we remains committed to the process, and will strive to achieve our stated objectives. There is now an urgent need for the CSAC to refocus on reviewing the various Bank projects (those in implementation as well as on the drawing board), and resume this part of our work – the advisory role. Of course, this also means a refocus on the responsibility and capacity of CSAC members. We look forward to the support of the Bank and its staff on this matter.

Part of the difficulty is that the length of time required to properly perform the tasks given to the CSAC is immense. To keep under review the Bank's Jamaica Country Strategy, a series of Sector Strategies, and a full portfolio of national project (under way and in the pipeline) is a big job; while at the same time we are required to advise the bank on other more general matters – a sort of social dialogue. The persons that will be of most use to the IDB on the CSAC will necessarily be busy people – already overcommitted and probably underpaid. For those who live and work far out of town, travel to and from home base around a CSAC meeting requires a whole day. Might there be some new modality that would allow CSAC members to spend more time o the required tasks?

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¹ Assessment and Re-Organization of the Civil Society Advisory Committee (CSAC). Page 3.