

MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

FEATURE ADDRESS BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE RENNIE DUMAS,
MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AT THE
CARIBBEAN DEVELOPEMNT BANK (CDB) AND
INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (IDB)
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS DIALOGUE:
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Chairman of today's CDB/IDB Civil Society Organization Dialogue, Representatives of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT), Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Representative of the IDB Mr. William Robinson, Representative of the CDB, facilitator Ms. Carol Ann Narcisse, Main Presenter Dr. Ivelaw Griffith of Florida International University, Miami, Florida, Moderators from the IDB and CDB, Participants from the Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations representing nineteen (19) countries and thirteen (13) regional organizations, Development Partners,

Distinguished Guests, Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen

A pleasant good morning! I bring you greetings on behalf of the GORTT on this occasion to mark the 3rd CDB/IDB Caribbean Regional Civil Society Organizations Dialogue. I consider it an honour to have been invited by your organization to speak at this important forum.

When I received this invitation, I was most pleased that the CDB and the IDB have been partnering to engage Civil Society Organizations in the Caribbean in dialogue on issues pertaining to Democratic Governance, Development Planning, Capacity Building and the Development of Suitable Communities.

It is a wonderful partnering which at the end will allow for designated institutional frameworks coupled with relevant activities and initiatives undertaken to ensure furtherance of the theme:

“CSOs responsibilities and actions in national decision-making, development planning and implementation.

This resonates with some of the initiatives and development programmes currently being undertaken by the Ministry of Local Government and has application in our major thrust to reform the Local Government System.

From the out set, I will therefore like to congratulate the organizers of this conference for their foresight and enlightened leadership. Clearly, you are flag bearers of the new wave of thinking in matters pertaining to Democratic Government, Regional Development and Planning, the Development of Sustainable Communities, Regional Integration, Local Capacity Building and Good Governance in general.

In matters of Democratic Government and Good Governance, one striking phenomena has developed over the past two decades or so, the increasing involvement and participation of Civil Societies in ensuring Good

Democratic Governance. The current emphasis on principles of Good Governance, such as accountability, transparency, equal opportunity, inclusion, value for money expended, social justice and equity, is in no small measure related to the fact that Civil Societies have clamored successfully to be an integral part of the Democratic Governance structures, systems and processes.

Globally, Governments have recognized CSOs and CBOs importance in the process of National decision-making, in resolving development planning issues, in successfully implementing policies and programmes for socio-economic development.

Thus, the tripartite partnership of the past, (i.e, Government, the Trade Unions and the Private Sector), has been replaced by the quadripartite partnership in which Civil Society is regarded as the fourth estate. Governments therefore, have found it critical to formulate and implement national policy perspectives marked by widespread and deep consultations with Civil Society groups.

Interestingly, with the advent of globalization, which according to Martin Albrow refers to all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society (global society), Civil Societies have also incorporated themselves into a single entity or organization for promoting common interests, actions and agendas.

In this context, here in Trinidad and Tobago there is an umbrella Civil Society Organization known as Trinidad and Tobago Citizen Agenda Network (TTCAN). This group has coined its agenda in the context of a vision, which reads:

“A new vision of governance is urgently needed, one which could produce sensitized, involved and empowered citizens. Meaningful Constitutional Reform can only be based on this objective”

Significantly, this organization in a document entitled “Transform Local Government:Create community well-being” identified some of our citizens perceptions in matters pertaining to infrastructure and physical planning. These included:

- Construction and maintenance of all secondary roads and traces, including bridges roadside, pedestrian paths and side walks as well as improper drainage and inadequate street lighting.
- Inspections of buildings and building sites – low levels of enforcement of building and land use codes.
- Public health laws regarding drainage, disposal of garbage as well as poor supervision of the provision of these services – by Local Government Authorities.

- Consultation with communities in determining needs and priorities and no strategic planning.
- Regard for the physically challenged in constructing sidewalks and in approving plans for public and commercial buildings.
- Delineation of responsibilities between Local Government and Central Government and its agencies resulting in citizens being given the “run around”.

A regional survey revealed that these are perceptions shared among citizens of the CARICOM region. Moreover, they also tend to indicate that citizens, who make-up Civil Society organizations are knowledgeable about development planning issues, can contribute to workable solutions in the process of national decision-making and more importantly can be part of the implementation process.

In this context, I have taken cognizance of the remarks of Mr. Desmond Brunton's, Vice President (operations) of the CDB at the last CDB/IDB Civil Society Organizations Dialogue held in Barbados January 25-27, 2005.

“that the current Governmental processes seem to have failed to fully involve the citizenry, and this has led to increased demands from consumers and Caribbean citizens generally – therefore Government processes and structures now need to be inclusive rather than exclusive and controlling”

Although this statement contains elements of truth; another dimension to this issue of citizens and Civil Societies participation and involvement in governance, which is seldom given ample attention is that opportunities provided for shared decision-making including available institutional mechanisms, are often not effectively utilized, even when they are brought to the attention of the general public. For

example, here in Trinidad and Tobago, although the existing Local Government Legislation provides mechanisms for citizens advisory committees, they are hardly ever utilized. Civil Societies therefore need to aggressively seek, embrace and effectively utilize all available mechanisms for participation and involvement in Governance and Development Planning.

CSOs responsibilities and actions in national decision-making, development planning and implementation can be conceptualized within the framework of decentralized governance and administration. In this context, Conyers (1989) has argued that decentralization as a strategy for development administration could be used as a means of improving the planning and implementation of development programmes and projects.

Here, three of the core benefits, which can be gained from decentralization, are:

- (i) Participation
- (ii) Speed and flexibility, and
- (iii) Co-ordination

Decentralization can facilitate popular participation in both planning and implementation of development projects thereby enhancing democratic governance, ensuring that projects are relevant to Local needs and requirements and eliciting local commitments to programme execution.

Decentralization can expedite the process of decision making since decisions can be made locally without recourse to central institutions thereby promoting development administration that is flexible and responsive to local needs.

Decentralization can also encourage co-ordination between sectoral agencies at the regional and local level, thereby promoting a more integrated approach to planning because decisions are made at the local level rather than at the central level.

The advocacy of decentralization may appear to run counter to CSOs responsibilities and action in Nation-

decision-making. The fact is, that only from a decentralized framework can local and regional environmental peculiarities, special needs, demands, concerns and development requirements be effectively channeled to the center, thereby bringing a regional flavour to National decisions and ensuring balanced National Development and Social Equity in development planning.

Recognizing that community based organizations could play a critical role in development planning and implementation, the Ministry of Local Government developed two programmes known as the Infrastructure Renewal, Improvement and Development Programme (IRIAD) and the Special Projects under the umbrella of the Unemployment Relief Programme, which essentially involves the development and implementation of community infrastructure projects.

The main aim of these programmes is to promote the development of sustainable communities through:

- Developing a cadre of community entrepreneurs and small businesses who competitively bid for community projects.
- Generating income and creating sustainable employment within communities.
- Empowering individuals and groups in communities in the planning and development of their communities.

These programmes have transformed the lives of many citizens in communities throughout the country, engaged them in improving the physical and social infrastructure of their communities and promoted economic growth through the generation of income and employment within communities.

In addressing the theme of this conference, CSOs responsibilities and actions in national decision-making, development planning and implementation, the central question that emerges is, what are the key issues and challenges involved within a CARICOM framework?

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES: WHICH ENCOMPASS:

- Understanding the National legal and regulatory frameworks
- The ability to identify and access the institutional mechanisms for National decision-making
- Understanding the nature, types, roles, functions and operations of democratic representative institutions
- The ability to demand and achieve effective political representation
- Accountability, transparency and responsiveness to development needs and demands

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING ISSUES:

- The formulation and prioritization of effective development strategies

- The promotion of the efficient use of resources
- The development and maintenance of physical and social infrastructure
- Institutional strengthening and capacity building
- The development of effective land use and policies
- Facilitating in disaster preparedness and management.

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

- Effective partnership and consultation
- Requirements of effective social and political regional integration
- Support for the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and
- The identification and combating of economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities
- Poverty reduction and eradication

- Promotion of education, health and economic well-being

The above issues and challenges provide a wide scope of opportunities for Civil Societies to assume responsibilities and engage in creative and innovative actions to ensure inclusive national policies, balanced development planning and effective and efficient implementation of programmes and projects. In this context, you may wish to contemplate and consider your democratic responsibilities and actions

- Facilitate and be actively engaged in programme prioritizing, implementing and monitoring of policies and projects with particular reference to change management issues.
- Facilitate in enhancing internal and external communications whilst strengthening the capacity of community organizations to identify and fulfill their needs.

- Keeping current with the latest legislation, policy perspectives and project assessment methods and techniques.
- Maintaining effective liaison with local, regional and centrally elected representatives and bring to their attention development needs, requirements, concerns and issues.
- Engage in the identification of resources and proffer recommendations for their optimum use.
- Promote partnerships with other social sectors especially the Private Sector.
- Promote educational programmes on the roles, functions and operations of democratic institutions.

- Actively engage in poverty and HIV eradication, employment creation, income generation and support and develop initiatives to control societal ills e.g. vagrancy.
- Encourage community entrepreneurship, innovativeness and creativity.

These all fall within the purview of the sub-themes for Dialogue over the next two days and further include issues such as Regional and National Security, Participatory Governance and Capacity Building and Financing. Moreover, under Regional and National Security; crime, food security and disaster preparedness are the main focus.

These issues and in particular crime and disaster preparedness have been threatening to erode the social fabric and pristine landscape of Caribbean societies and more importantly debase the quality of life of our peoples. Indeed, the crime wave in the face of robust economic growth and prosperity has influenced many social

commentators and scholars in the Caribbean to question the validity of conventional western economic theory that rapid economic growth and prosperity normally contribute to the decline in criminal activities. Civil Societies must play its part in reversing this trend.

In terms of disaster preparedness, much of the disasters experienced by Caribbean countries in the recent past such as destructive hurricanes, land slides and flooding from unprecedented torrential rainfalls have been attributed to the effects of global warming, fuelled by the depletion of the ozone layer and excessive carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We all have a responsibility to reverse this trend by embracing the principles of the Kyoto Protocol, an accord that was brokered in Kyoto Japan in 1997. This accord endorsed a legally binding framework to address the problem of global climate change, laying down a threshold limit for quantified reduction of green house gas emissions. Civil Societies have to play a more active role in partnering with Governmental institutions and the Private Sector in

alleviating the suffering caused by these natural disasters and restoring communities to their pristine state.

The unusual high incidence of national disasters has promoted many regional and international organizations such as the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Network for Decentralization, Local Government and Citizen Participation (RIAD) to recognize natural disasters as a global and hemispheric challenge and the need for Governments at all levels to co-operate and develop co-ordination mechanisms and activities to combat same.

Another great challenge is public sector modernization not only for National Governments but citizens to whom public institutions are expected to provide quality goods and services on a timely basis. Apart from the need to replace antiquated structures, systems and techniques with modern ones, E-Government is rapidly becoming the norm in matters of Public Service transactions. However, implementation still remains the greatest challenge and is in

no small measure related to lack of effective and efficient management and in particular, monitoring, follow-up, reviewing and appropriate corrective action as and when required.

In the latest MORI poll of September, 2005, 50% of the respondents perceived the services delivered by the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago to be of a poor quality and 33% regarded service delivery as slow. If low productivity seems to be the norm, this is just the symptom and I dare say, the real cause is the prevailing mind-set and a value orientation, which places a low premium on service to the public.

I challenge Civil Societies to facilitate in the reversal of this trend by being actively engaged in the monitoring, follow-up, assessment inclusive of the reporting on the quality of service delivery to communities.

I have no doubt whatsoever that during the course of your Dialogue, you will explore all possible avenues, strategies

and methods of fulfilling your mandate and proclaim, innovative, creative and workable solutions to achieve the collective goals which you have set out to accomplish.

I urge all of you to contribute to the discussion and articulate your views, within the spirit of democracy and make a concerted effort to promote and improve the teamwork needed between Civil Society, Governments and Private Enterprise.

I wish you success and a mutually beneficial, productive and rewarding Dialogue.

I thank you and may God bless you.