
SOME PROBLEMS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN

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On receiving the invitation to address you I felt honoured and equally surprised. Even to those who do not know me, my credentials must be immediately suspect, for clearly I am no youth. No doubt then, I have some professional qualification, some acknowledged expertise in the field of community development. Regretfully, I confess that I have not. I can only hope that the thoughts of an interested layman, who has tried to help, will be of some value; and I propose to offer a few comments on the problems facing those who must devise policies for youth and community development in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

Generalization will not be easy. In the Commonwealth Caribbean, some are tiny islands with meagre natural resources and populations measurable in the hundreds. Some are comparatively vast continental territories on the mainlands of Central and South America. Some are mountainous, some are flat, and some are both. Some are mainly dependent on agriculture, others are not. Most are poor, but one is counted among the richest nations in the world today. Some are peopled by a wide variety of ethnic types, others are more narrowly Afro-European. Some have been exclusively the colonial possessions of Britain, others have also been colonial possessions of other European powers. Most are now independent nations, but some are in a metropolitan relationship described as "Associated Statehood", and a few still remain as British colonies. If all I have managed to do by this recital is to confuse you, let me say that it is a confusing picture. I have therefore laid on the table a few copies of a publication of the Social Development Commission of Jamaica. It is called "The Caribbean Today" and it sets out the main geographic, economic, political and social features of the Caribbean territories in the early 1970's.

Fortunately, on the matter of the policies of Commonwealth Caribbean Governments with regard to Youth and Community Development, generalization is possible: there are no fundamentally considered policies. There are, instead, a wide and constantly changing variety of ad hoc measures. As far as they concern youth, these measures all began, and still are largely regarded as 'youth-rescue operations'. They are undoubtedly necessary; but youth policies should be designed to remove, or at least to reduce, those social ills which unavoidably make youth-rescue operations necessary.

One reason for this ad hoc approach is historical. In colonial days the youth of the country were, like their elders, seen to belong to one of three main categories;

there were those obviously of European descent whose privilege it was to inherit the management of the society and the economy; there were those whose determination to be recognized as metropolitan rather than colonial was noddingly approved by those above; and there were those, the majority by far, and in general the darker-skinned by far, whose duty it was to provide cheap and contented labour in the service of their patronising and benevolent betters. In our colonial societies, thus structured, measured approval recognized the advancement in society of the black-faced white; while deploring whispers followed the almost treasonable decline of a white-faced black. In our colonial societies, thus structured, community development planning had no place. What was important was the working classes should be kept content in their status. Occasional outbursts of discontent were met as they arose, and it took the general Caribbean labour protests of the late 1930's to awaken those in charge of our affairs to the fact that the twentieth century was upon them. But even then they did not fully understand what was happening. Even today, some who understand do not approve; for what was and still is happening is the gradual tumbling of the established social order with its categories previously described. And if there is time to name only one of those responsible for that assault upon establishment there is not the slightest hesitation in remembering Marcus Garvey, the one who first told the colonial blacks to shed their acceptance on their inferior status as servants of the Europeans, and to stand with pride as men and women of African descent inherently inferior to none.

Because of the labours of Marcus Garvey, and others who have followed him, the "ad hoc" approach, which was never justifiable in moral principle, is now also in the Commonwealth Caribbean untenable in terms of desirable policy. We, like others, need policies for community development, not occasional treatments for occasional troublesome disorders. That is now the generally accepted view. Nonetheless, there are obstacles in the way of translating view into action, and I plead my profession as I once again refer to our history.

In the nineteenth century, after the British abolition of slavery, governments, both colonial and metropolitan, encouraged population growth in support of cheap labour for the sugar industry. Blacks were encouraged to breed, and immigrant labourers were sought out and brought into the Caribbean from Africa, India, China, North America, and Europe. These inflows enriched our cultures, but because of the nature and purpose of the importations, and the concurrent encouragements to population growth by natural increase, they also led to social tensions which were, and still are, strongly felt in those territories to which the immigrants came in the largest numbers. Such tension clearly impedes both social planning and the successful implementation of whatever plans are in fact designed.

Another obstacle arising out of rapid population growth in

the later 19th and 20th centuries, is the simple fact that there are more people to be considered. Unfortunately, economic growth has not kept pace with population growth; consequently, the incidence of unemployment and underemployment has increased, and the need for assistance daily outgrows the means by which assistance can be afforded. In such circumstances there is a very clear inducement to continue in the "ad hoc" path, trying to cope with each critical demand as it arises, rather than to use scarce money in the initiation of basic, but long-term preventive policies. The poor are always made poorer by their poverty.

But not all the obstacles are of 19th century origin. One of the greatest deterrents to successful community development planning in the Commonwealth Caribbean today is political rivalries which, after the introduction of universal adult suffrage in the 1940's, were spread by the wider political campaigning. These rivalries are based in part, on real differences of view and proposal, in part, on racial divisions; and in part, on a simple lust for power and the "perks" that go with it. Drive, in Jamaica, from east to west through Kingston and you will pass, not through communities of Jamaicans, but through camps of PNP and JLP, and, not improbably, through gunfire. Drive in Guyana, from Georgetown to New Amsterdam, and you will pass through communities of blacks and communities of east Indians, but seldom through communities of both. Clearly, in both places, though perhaps from different causes, there is little possibility of doing more than agitating differences or pacifying conflicts. Community development planning must be in the interest of the people at large, not of any particular group, political or other. It is always the conceit of a governing party that what they do is best for the nation; it is always the conceit of an opposition party that what they would do would be best for the nation. This is understandable party polemics. What is not so clearly understandable is what they mean by "the nation". More often than not it seems to mean "those who voted for us" or, alternatively, "those whose votes we hope to get". That is no basis for true community development.

What should by now be clear to all observers in the Commonwealth Caribbean is that the youth are becoming increasingly disaffected - not simply by their growing unemployment and frustration, but also by their distaste for impropriety in high places; for dishonesty, especially at the expense of the poor; and for government by verbiage rather than by deed. What should be equally clear to all, and perhaps of greatest import to those in search of votes, is that our Caribbean populations fall preponderantly in the age-range under 25. The disaffection, consequently, is large.

This disaffection, and the politicians' awareness of it, lead to other distortions of youth and community development planning by which, for instance, the community is neglected while the youth are singled out for almost exclusive attention. A clear example of this was the setting up in the

Social Development Commission in Jamaica of a Sports Division replete with Director, and staff for office and for field. The Division engaged itself exclusively in the encouragement by coaching, and the sponsorship by competitive fixtures, of the more vigorous national sports, especially football and cricket; and it was perhaps most concerned to discover and to bring to competitive maturity young people of promising talent in those games.

Now if the purpose of the Sports Development Division were only to develop sports and players that would have been a perfectly reasonable way to go about it. But a Social Development Commission has much wider and much more fundamental concerns than the making of world-class footballers, or cricketers, or swimmers, or others. A Social Development Commission is, presumably, concerned with social development. As such, its "Sports" Officers (and a more appropriate designation would help) might better be concerned with broader enquiry into the uses of leisure in the society; the encouragement of vigorous sports, yes, but not to the exclusion of the gentler pastimes of the old, or the preferences of others such as players of chess or of dominoes. After all, those who now because of age or infirmity are content with cards, were at one time players of cricket; and those who now play cricket will one day be satisfied with cards. Moreover, a Social Development Commission should, through its field staff, do more than facilitate the employment by young and by old of recognized games. It should also research, and develop means by which the range of leisure-time activities might be increased to include all sorts of pastime pursuits; games of all kinds, creative arts, hobbies - all means by which the very young, the adolescent, the adult, and the aged, in all their conditions of physical strength or weakness might find relaxation and employment. How did cricket begin? At first, perhaps, with a stick and a stone. There are many simple things that children do that might be elevated to the rank of popular, national sports or pastimes.

And so, I would suggest, that the temptation to treat the youth as though they alone form the community should be avoided. The temptation is strong. It is paternalistic; but youth do not wish to be treated in pseudo-paternal fashion. It might appear, because of the preponderance of the population under 25 years of age, to be vote-catching; but the youth do not count themselves as votes. It is disciplinary, because we feel unsettled by the rudeness and the threats of the youthful unemployed; but real discipline is self-imposed and the youth see indisciplines of the same and other sorts among their elders.

I do not argue that the youth should not be given special place in our planning. They should. But they are not alone in the streets, or in the homes, or even in the jails. Let us plan for communities including young and old. That is the best way for the benefit of both. Years perhaps bring wisdom, but they also sap the vigour, and perhaps the courage; years lean on the proven pillars of experience, but

they weaken in the vision of the untried. Those with years make youth, and youth become those with years, and on that understanding of the cycle of life we should plan for our youth in our communities. We should plan - meaning young and old together, each contributing to the general purpose, the strengthening of the bonds of understanding and the enrichment in all its aspects of life in the community.

But here again we run into difficulties, for we always, generation after generation, seek to mould the youth in our own image. The never dying "generation gap" so-called is not to be deplored. It is the indication of differences of view between the older citizens whose attitudes and habits are formed and the younger who are shaping theirs. In the Commonwealth Caribbean the historical development of our societies has bred in us master-servant attitudes and authoritarian habits. We tell the youth rather than guide them.

Nowhere is this more evident than in our school rooms. There, far too many teachers, uninformed and untrained, rest their authority on their titles, and their confidence on the whip or on the verbal assault. The fact of poverty always cramps our style. No Minister of Education can really be happy at the thought of thousands of children being badly taught, wrongly taught, without recourse to books, equating education with exposure to a series of multiple choice questions. Equally, no Minister of Education will happily announce the dreadful state of affairs. Better by far to explain that within the past five years 300 schools were built and 300,000 more school children now attend. But attend to what?

In reference to Jamaica - but the comments can with safety be more widely applied - I once wrote that even twenty years ago the education of Jamaicans was practically empty of relevance to Jamaican needs. We were brought up on English literature, English history, English geography, and mathematical quizzes about the times trains took to travel from London to Glasgow if they ran at x or y miles an hour. In the process of learning, where the facts are irrelevant and the imagery foreign, we learn to develop powers of memory rather than powers of understanding and analysis. Now we would like to change, but can we? With teachers who so often lack understanding of what they teach? With ministeries that have too little money to provide the training and the books? And with populations growing at a little under 3 per cent per annum?

But we must give to our youth the chance to develop their understanding, their creative talents, and thus to build a solid basis for a proper confidence. Let them learn to think, help them to develop faculties of enquiry and discernment; and this is not achieved by simple instruction. Let me give just one illustration:

In Guyana I find myself asking questions to which for various reasons I have not had unequivocal replies.

Guyana is known as the "Co-operative Republic". That is one thing: it suggests that the Guyanese people are willing to co-operate with others and among themselves - a highly desirable condition. In the Co-operative Republic great emphasis is placed on teaching about co-operatives. Indeed, I believe that such instruction is now compulsory in all the government supported schools. I have never attended in Guyana (or anywhere for that matter) any course of learning which dealt exclusively or even mainly with co-operatives; and I do not therefore know what the syllabus includes. I can only assume that it informs about the history and the aims, organization, and structure of co-operatives as a form of business enterprise. Going by occasional information in the Guyanese press I am led to a second assumption: namely that it is also taught that a co-operative is the best form of business enterprise and should be widely adopted as a means to the real economic development of Guyana.

Here is where my questions begin. Do the courses on co-operatives include fairly presented comparative information on the aims, organization and structure of other forms of business enterprise such as family firms, partnerships, private companies, public companies and whatever else there may be? And is it on the basis of such fair and reasonable comparisons applied to the social and economic conditions of Guyana that is claimed (if it is so claimed) that co-operatives are best? And if so, is that claim advanced on challengeable opinion? Or is it simply handed down as incontrovertible fact determined by those who know for those who do not? I am not here criticising the policy of encouragement to co-operative enterprise. I think that there is much to be said in favour of it - and this has been amply demonstrated in some of other small self-help employment enterprise in a number of Caribbean territories.

I am simply asking whether our youth are being instructed that co-operatives are best, or whether they are being asked to examine, accept, reject, modify - in other words to look for understanding, and to exercise their creative talents.

There is, in fact, much to be said in favour of informing the youth about co-operatives and other forms of small business enterprise. One of the major weaknesses of our educational systems in the Commonwealth Caribbean is that they were designed to train people for employment by others. This involved emphasis on comprehension, rather than on expression; on obedience, rather than on initiative; on job security, rather than on enterprise; and on understanding of the social and economic hierarchy, and one's place in it, rather than on self-confidence in dealing with others.

Even today, when we talk of youth development programmes we tend to think in terms of para-military training, of trade training, agricultural training, and, where necessary, basic or remedial training in numeracy and literacy. What help really are these in kindling the sorts of confidence our youths should have?

Military training emphasises quickness of physical action, obedience to superiors, and such initiative as is likely to win medals which are bestowed by superiors. It offers nothing to the imaginative except visions of death or of glory. It numbs the finer sensibilities. Soldiers are trained to avoid their own deaths at the hands of others, and with their own hands to ensure the deaths of others whom they are instructed to destroy. Such training may well be necessary for the protection of the nation against foreign assault, but never in any sense can it be claimed to be good for community development.

Trade training is obviously more desirable. It can be productive, whereas military training in its true sense is training for destruction or, at best, for preservation. Fortunately, in certain branches of the military, trade training is even more important than weapons training. But trade training alone does not suffice. The skilled or semi-skilled tradesman must either work for someone else, or be self-employed in his own business or joint venture. Working for someone else means finding a job. Trade training, therefore, should be associated with regular projections of manpower needs and with job placement services. Additionally, to serve the self-employed, it should be associated with credit facilities to allow the qualified tradesman to set up in business; and also with the basic elements of small business management to help him run the business successfully. Without these ancillaries, trade training is likely to bring frustration rather than fortune to its graduates. Frustration does not subscribe to community development.

As far as agricultural training goes, much the same sort of comment seems appropriate. Agricultural workers need jobs, farmers need land and substantial credit with which to establish their farms.

Basic literacy and numeracy training projects are of a different order. Perhaps the most extensive, and expensive, of these is the JAMAL programme in Jamaica. It is, in a very real sense, community-based. Classes are held in towns and villages throughout the island and they are attended by men and women, boys and girls. In short, they cater to all in the community who wish to learn to read and write. But JAMAL is, in the other sense, a perfect example of the 'rescue operation'. The questions we must ask are: Why are there so many who need JAMAL? and is there no substance in the argument that if the very substantial resources now being put into Jamal were put into the schools there might be less need for a rescue operation in the future?

In summary of all of this I would say that although training should form one important aspect of community development, the training programmes now engaged in (even including to some extent military training) are 'rescue operations' offering to the drop-outs, the unqualified, the unemployed, the unemployable, a chance to get what they should have got from the formal educational system. Since our formal

educational system is not ever likely, any more than anybody else's, to be able to satisfy everybody, these 'rescue operations' will no doubt continue to form part of any large programme of community development; but we should not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of thinking that social or community development is essentially a reclamation exercise.

What then should ministries or other agencies of community development do? Clearly, I think, they should help communities to develop, and I should like to conclude by making a few proposals.

First of all, I would emphasize that the growth and development of a community rests on a wide variety of factors, and on services which no single agency of government or of assistance can provide. It seems to me then, that a most important aspect of the work would be to provide a liaison service for the community. Let us suppose for instance, that the Ministry of Health proposes to hold a one-day seminar on the importance of a well-balanced diet for the physical growth of the child. Should not the Ministry of Education and perhaps also the Ministry of Agriculture, and the ministry responsible for internal trade and food distribution be involved? I do not mean that the Ministry of Community Development should become a post-office or a clearing-house, and thus may be even an abominable nuisance, to its fellow ministries. I suggest that the field-staff of that Ministry should be trained to look for linkages and relationships between various services, events, programmes, and to try to develop those relationships. The mother who is told that her children should eat more carrots might like to feel more confident that she can grow them or find them in the market. Such field staff should be well equipped to advise individuals and communities where to go for particular kinds of information or assistance in all sorts of matters.

I suggest that the field-staff should include chroniclers and collectors of the lore of the community.

I have already hinted at this in my remarks on leisure-time activities. What local songs, what local games, what local dances, what local stories, what local recipes and ways of making things? And here let me make another point. There may well be a Ministry of Sport, there may well be a Ministry of Culture, and it would be, presumably, their respective responsibility to develop sports on the national level, and to cherish and preserve the national heritage. But the Ministry of Community Development is, must be, a real grass-roots, village-centred, community-centred agency. From its local efforts, others may gather the material for the national effort. Not all the lore of the village will find its place in the national record; indeed most of it may not; but that does not deny its local importance.

So far, I have dealt with only one aspect of the local lore. There is another. In every community, rural and urban, but more so in the rural areas where the landscape is less subject to rapid changes, there are monuments. Old sugar mill

old lime kilns, old churches, old shops and taverns, old houses, great and small, old trees around which a market used to gather - all of that is part of the local history, and it should be also part of the awareness of the local community. That is the sort of history that is not, cannot, easily be taught in schools where formal education operates on set syllabuses geared to established tests of skill and knowledge. But it is important, for it helps the people to find their links with the past, and that is what so-called 'cultural roots' are all about. I do not say that community development field staff should be local historians or antiquarians. I mean that they should look and ask and constantly invoke in the community the spirit of enquiry.

And that leads me to another function which I think community development field-staff might well perform. With one notable exception we, in the Commonwealth Caribbean are poor. We are poor because of the long years of disadvantage we have endured as the small sellers of raw or semi-processed agricultural products, and the buyers of machinery and manufacture from larger, richer and more powerful trading-partners. This may not be the proper place for it, but allow me, even parenthetically, to mention the current proposals for consideration of a new world economic order. The producers of food have as much claim to a full and decent life as do the canners of food and the sellers of canned foods.

We, in the Commonwealth Caribbean are poor also because of financial mismanagement, political gamesmanship, wasteful expenditure, and plain corruption; but let me observe, that in all of this it is only in our poverty that we differ from the rich. They can afford mismanagement, waste and corruption. We cannot.

The poor man cannot afford risk, however well-calculated the chances of success. Moreover, as I have already indicated, our educational system has been geared to the production of job hunters rather than entrepreneurs. (It is remarkable how many of our successful businessmen were no more than average performers in the classrooms, and how quickly they removed themselves from those deserts of initiative).

We now have two very large tasks to fulfil; we must, as poor people, constantly be on the alert to recognize, and bring into productive use, new or still unused resources. In Jamaica, in our present hard times of little money and soaring prices, we are under pressures beginning to do this. The little yard that previously grew stones or graas now grows callaloo. There is much more to be done. In the past, the wood of the rose-apple tree was used, because of its suppleness and strength, in the making of paths of horse-drawn buggies and coaches. We no longer have buggies, but we still have rose-apple trees. Are they not good for anything else? Others, in other parts of the world, have shown us what can be done with bamboo, with coconut-shell, with turtle-shell, and a variety of other materials. We have followed their example. Are there no

other materials, under our very noses, that we have not seen as sources of income? In all of this the community development field-staff should play a part.

We have had enough of the little gatherings of boys and girls making mats and coconut cake. We need more alertness, more imagination, more zest in our search for means to help those in the community to recognize for themselves their own resources. Too much is the idea of community development linked with the attempt to do things for people. Much more should it be based on a determination to move individuals, as members of the community in which they live, to come alive in their own and in the community's interest.

In other words we must encourage enterprise and entrepreneurship. But, if we are to do this among those whose enterprise, because of poverty, is small, we must encourage them by finding means to protect them from their present fears and perhaps from the future consequences of failure. The first has to do with training in small business operations, skills, marketing, and all the techniques that will give confidence for the adventure. The second has to do with insurance against failure. I do not say that community development ministries or agencies should largely engage in providing such assistance. What they can do is to recruit whatever local resources may be available in a community to serve this need and, at the same time, put pressure on others whose business it is to make educational and financial provision.

So far, I have pictured the local community development office as a catalyst, looking, pushing, encouraging the community to move for itself. In doing this, however, the local officer should come to know the community well. Indeed, the job could not be done if ignorance of the community prevailed. An important part of the local officer's work therefore could be the provision of information, at regular intervals, about the community. The landscape and changes in it as they occur; the major employment and occupation; the population and, in rough terms, its various distribution by age, employment, physical location, and so forth; the available local resources which might be better utilized; the availability of social services and amenities; and a number of other matters.

I say that this could be rather than would be, an important part of the local officer's work because I am not unaware of the temptation there would be to use that officer as a sort of political informer. That would be disastrous. The purpose of the reports would be to indicate the measure of well-being in the life of the community, not the political affiliations of its members, or the political gossip in its rum-shops, or the activities of the supporters of one political side or the other.

I have said that one of the great present deterrents to community development in the Commonwealth Caribbean is political rivalries. There is no doubt of it, and yet, I want to recommend the establishment, where they do not exist, and

the annoblement where they do, of local community councils. That may seem paradoxical, but it is not. The community councils I would wish to see would be community councils, not local bodies of a governing or an opposition party. Their officers would above all be servants of their communities. and not of ministers of government. Their politics would be local, and not national party politics. It should be they, the local community councils, rather than local political party organizers, who should be heard in the assessments of the conditions of the people in their local communities. And it might serve as well if those now engaged in constitutional reform could find the ways in which these local councils would be, not simply the monitors in their communities of policies already made by government, but also in some measure the advisers in the making of these policies. I have very serious doubts that in our present political and economic circumstances, the welfare of the people will be put above the welfare of the ruling political party; and in some way I should like to see the people, in their communities, called in to redress the balance.

I am aware that in this, as in much else that I have said, I might well be accused of making vague generalization rather than usefully specific comment and proposal. I plead guilty; but I also plead the necessity of the crime. It is tempting to pretend that we cure the illness by alleviating the symptoms. That, in terms of social development planning, is simply to persist in the ad hoc approach.

I hope that in some measure I have succeeded in uncovering these basic causes which, in our ex-colonial societies, militate against strong community awareness and growth. I speak of our long and adverse economic history as suppliers of raw materials, and purchasers of more expensive commodities of value added. I speak of our lack of self-confidence born of long advocacy of the social and intellectual superiority of the metropolitan elite. I speak of the cultural problems, as well as the cultural diversity, of societies formed through the centuries of adventuring, dominating, and, indeed, domineering Europeans, uprooted Africans, and transplanted Indians, Chinese, and others. And, arising out of all of that, and in case you have never heard Bob Marley, I remind you of the "rat-race" of our daily lives: the "rat-race" in search of food and favour. Those are some of the factors which contribute to our present social ills, and in any well-founded youth development programme they must be the prime targets of attack.

Ladies and gentlemen I thank you for your patience, and I apologise for the apparent presumption with which, as a layman, observer, I have declared my piece.