

EDUCATION FOR SURVIVAL IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

by

Dr. Clayton Shillingford

INTRODUCTION

This one-day Symposium is being held at a critical point in Dominica's economic and social development. It will be carried out under the auspices of the Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences (DAAS), the Rosie Douglas Foundation (RDF), and affiliated Dominican Associations in the UK, US, Canada and elsewhere. As indicated in the title it will attempt to define the role of "The Dominican Diaspora in the Development Process" at a time when the economic survival of the country is under threat.

The Education Panel aims to create greater trust and understanding between resident Dominicans and either returning nationals or overseas residents to see how the potential for significant contribution to national development can be achieved.

Background

The Statistical Digest published in October 1999 on the occasion of the 21st Anniversary of Dominica's Independence showed that:

- College enrollment had tripled between 1978/79 and 1998/99 and that pre-school enrollment increased by 761 from a base of 1803 in 1980/81. Yet there was a decline in total school population.
- At the same time, total number of schools and teachers had increased. Teachers in High Schools doubled over the 21-year period and represented the highest rise in number of teachers.
- Preschools showed an increase of 32 more centers. Primary schools were reduced in number and reflected a student to teacher ratio of 22/1 compared to 28/1 in the 1980/81 academic year.
- The male repetition and drop out rates had increased while the female rates had dropped. Females have also had a higher pass rate at the Common Entrance Exam.
- Between 1980/81 and 1997/98, there was a 95% increase in number of students completing High School and students completing College registered 177% increase.
- In 1991, about 34% of the male population was trained as Craft and Related Workers, of which 26% represented Technical and Associated Professions.
- Forty one percent of women were trained in the Technical and Associated Professions group followed by 22% in the Clerical group.
- The 1991 census revealed that 35% of males had attained a Primary School education, and 6% completed High School, compared to 32% females completing

Primary School and 9% attaining a High School education. Males surpassed females at the University level in 1991, recording 608 to 352 females.

- In 1997/98 academic year there were 22,415 persons enrolled at educational institutions representing 30% of the total population. These are bare statistics. They say nothing of the quality or relevance of the educational system.

Dominica's fortunes depend to a very large extent on our position in the global economy. We have to persevere against the unsentimental forces of globalization. Education will be an important corner stone to our development strategy. Our neighbour to the northwest, Cuba, has been able to survive in spite of severe pressures because they adopted aggressive programs in education and health. Costa Rica has been called the Switzerland of Latin America because of their superior educational system.

Citizenship

Our citizens must know and be able to enforce their rights as consumers and citizens in a democratic society. This can be achieved through public debate and discussion and information about the quality of service for which consumers are paying. It is not unusual in Dominica to hear frequent announcements that essential public utilities, water and electricity, will be shut off and to hear the statement from the utility company that "we regret the inconvenience to the public". The problems are chronic and the causes are well known. Inefficiencies are passed to the public in higher rates.

Citizenship must stand on a sound understanding of our history (slavery, colonialism, dependence, poverty) and culture (music, art, folk lore, cuisine, language etc).

We must mount aggressive voter registration and non-partisan education drives in every community including our non- resident communities. Our citizens should be taught to watch dog all Government decisions, including appointments of persons to high positions to ensure their commitment to justice, fair play and the national interest. We must increase our activities in coalition building by integrating our efforts with other Dominican or international institutions that share our mission and purposes.

Native Carib Dominicans should be brought into full citizenship in our country in work, education, and health services.

Relevance of Education

Our educational institutions should examine the curricula in great depth to assure relevance to the social and economic development needs of our society. In that context, agricultural training should be high on the agenda, as should computer literacy. We need focused attention to provide accelerated education to women, older citizens and other disadvantaged citizens to close the gap between those who are reasonably "fluent" in computer concepts and applications and those who are being left behind. The impact will be a marked effect on productivity and quality of life for our citizens and a leap forward for the economy.

Technology

We are living in a world in which the pace of technological innovation is increasing daily. We have an urgent need to move with the times. We must provide a broad education to our people of all age groups in computers, contemporary science, medicine and health. We have an immediate need for continuing education of the adult population to improve their knowledge and to upgrade the skills of those who are already employed. That is the mission of DAAS and RDF. That mission must be broadened to include every citizen. We should spend time creating new things not recreating old ideas. We must close the digital and literacy divide among our people.

Productivity

Productivity is low both in the private and public sectors. Measures of productivity have not been included in the Statistical Digest nor in the 1998 "Review of the Economy". We need to accomplish more with our existing physical and human resources. We need to work smarter and faster through education, better communications, appropriate technology and information. We have to persevere against the unsentimental forces of globalization.

Employees should be trained to develop the attitude that we are all in the same boat and should it sink we will all sink as well. We need a new spirit of entrepreneurship. Greater effort should be devoted to identifying leaders in our ranks. Leaders and good managers will not arise through nepotism, favouritism and victimization. As an example, I was at the Ministry of Communications and Works during a recent visit. Some of the employees were playing calypso on the radio and dancing in the hallway during working hours. Presumably they had nothing productive to do. Our attitude towards work must change. Monetary or other reward system is a benefit from work and productive activity. We must learn that truth. The culture of indifference, "tou chaud tou flam" and "chou poule" must go.

Productivity must come as well from our prisons and juvenile detention facilities. Both facilities should engage in rehabilitative and training programs.

Economic development

The Government and private industry should take an immediate look at our talent and human resource wherever that may reside. Why should we employ non-nationals in our development efforts when we have as good or better-qualified persons in our national pool? Moreover, non-nationals do not have the intensity of interest and background knowledge to ensure relevance of the project and the appropriate skills for implementation. Hence the vast library of reports on projects in Government offices that are dust collectors. Our professionals must partner with donor agencies, NGO's, international financial institutions like World Bank and IMF to ensure practicability of their proposals. Through collaborative effort, we must take a closer look at not only ways to develop local markets but also regional markets. Private and public sector must partner to ensure that curricula are

compatible with employment requirements of business and service industries. Additionally private and public sector must provide opportunity for high school and returning University students to have internships in the real world of work.

Social development

There are many problems related to racism, discrimination, and poverty that our society has been reluctant to address. For many there is still inadequate access to health care, jobs, and other basic services. Gender discrimination and sometimes violence against women is still part of our society.

Politics

The first requirement here is to provide the vote to our nationals who reside abroad. They can bring a different perspective to bear on the political debate and national priorities. The move to build institutions like DAAS and RDF plus multiple Dominica Associations around the world provide new avenues for creative thought, investment, marketing opportunities, and leadership. We must be watchful at all times that our leaders are not on a campaign of aggrandizement and self interest.

Teachers

Teachers should be required to do refresher courses to upgrade their knowledge and skills through a continuing certification system. Then since teaching is so central to our educational endeavours, the private and public sectors should make that profession as rewarding as possible.

Parental counseling should be provided. Parents should not only care for children, but also assist in the development of character, discipline, work ethic, ambition and guidance for them to become productive citizens. Mentoring should be targeted especially at our youth, but can be extended to adults as well. A program to help with homework and development of a positive attitude should be implemented.

Gender issues

Male students are performing worse than female students. Many teachers are women; this may have an effect in terms of absence of male role models.

Literacy

Many of our citizens are not literate. We should develop new forms of education for them. We must stop violence against women and the underprivileged in our society.

We must now deal with literacy defined as reading and writing as well as literacy in computers and technology. There is an immediate need to bring the current school population into the computer world as well as to train workers in basic computer applications. This action is essential to increase productivity. Clerks are still handwriting invoices and receipts. In businesses inventory control is still a laborious exercise of "taking Stock". I have already alluded to computer and technological literacy. But we must establish the necessary foundation of reading and writing. Language arts should include Spanish and French as we move to closer collaboration with Latin America and our French neighbours.

The brain drain

Knowledge is power. Dominica has that critical mass of brainpower scattered throughout the Diaspora. It is time to make a collective effort to engage that power for the survival and growth of the nation. As a small nation in a rapidly growing global economy we must challenge all the old ways and find new creative means to protect the national interest.

Environmental protection

We must teach our people and visitors to respect our fragile environment. Legislation may be in place to protect our forests, soils, water and air quality but we need to educate people to not only obey the law but to ensure that the image of the Nature Island can be maintained. Concern for the environment is critical to our development as a viable ecotourism location.

DAAS a cosponsor with RDF of this Symposium are seeking "practical solutions to Dominica's social and economic problems and attainable development goals". Both are non-profit, non-governmental organizations. Together their mission is to help Dominicans gain understanding, acquire relevant knowledge, and develop skills for living in a globally interdependent and culturally diverse world.

Recommendations

Beyond the recommendations cited above, I would like to endorse some of the recommendations made by **Lester Telemaque** in a Discussion Paper on the DAAS website titled [Improving Education in Dominica](#). His recommendations refer mostly to Dominican youth.

I have paraphrased his recommendations below:

- **PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT**
The government would be encouraged to give incentives to businesses in the form of tax breaks to encourage more involvement in the educational system. The schools would be provided with the basic materials like books and computers

needed to improve the quality of education. The general upkeep of the schools could also be the responsibility of private companies.

- **MENTORING PROGRAMME**

Students can stay after school to receive help with their assignments. The volunteers can participate in a training programme funded through central government, local governments or through funding agencies. DAAS can play a major role in this respect by volunteering time for career guidance.

- **PARENTAL COUNSELING - TEACHING PARENTS TO PARENT**

Programs are needed to have counselors help parents learn skills to motivate their children. By collaborating with the appropriate agencies and the schools, the councilors can ensure that parents who need help the most can get it.

- **READING AND WRITING**

A recent national assessment showed that more than 70% of young Dominicans are not reading up to their grade level. Reading specialists should be in every school in Dominica.

- **JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER**

The need for a juvenile detention center in Dominica is of paramount importance. Too many young people are placed in prison with seasoned criminals and return to society with the view of committing more crime. These individuals can be sent to a center where the focal point will be on rehabilitation.

- **TEACHER TRAINING**

The prevailing opinion is that a commendable job is done to train teachers. More refresher courses are needed for teachers to upgrade their skills in new educational trends and practices. Teachers are being lost to the private sector, to other Caribbean islands and now probably to the US. The future of our country is at stake. Quality education is one way to improve the economy and welfare of our Dominican citizens.

Lester Telemaque is a primary school teacher by profession. If you wish to communicate with him, his address is: Pointe Michel, Dominica Tel: (767) 448-7598/4806

© Dr. Clayton Shillingford: Re-publication with author's permission only.