

# *Mobilizing Caribbean Nationals in Canada in support of Caribbean Development*

A Proposal by [Michael White](#)

## **Introduction**

The nationals of any one country living in another, represent a potential link between the two countries and a valuable resource for their country of origin. Not all immigrants choose consciously to maintain and advance their links or to work for the good of their homeland, but that does not diminish the significance of the connection.

Caribbean nationals living abroad are, in general, strongly bonded to, and nostalgic about their islands. Many visit home regularly, as often as they can, particularly around the holiday seasons: Christmas, Carnival, Easter, Jazz; for family reunions, family milestones and special events; or, very often, in furtherance of business and financial interests. Those who are not so fortunate, dream about it, talk about it, and live it vicariously in the recounting of visits by their relatives and friends.

Immigrants account for a substantial percentage of the financial flows from North America and Europe to the Caribbean. Personal remittances to relatives and for payments of mortgages, purchase of land and other obligations, are important sources of national income. They are often the only source of income and means of survival of parents and children left behind. These remittances go into construction of homes, purchase of consumer durables, payment for education and health services, and so on. In the re-flows they support employment, productivity and economic growth.

Travelling the other way, products and services of all kinds flow from the islands to North America, in bags, boxes, musical talent, on paper and through the skills of those back home. The benefit is mutual.

These transactions, particularly the non-monetary ones, can be called informal or at any rate, unorganized transfers. They happen because of social and family relationships and are in many instances unrecorded. However, their collective value is great.

The greatest potential for impact on the economic and social development of the Caribbean by its nationals abroad is, however, felt to be in the yet untried systematic organization and mobilization of available resources:

- Investment capital/ Savings
- Trade Development
- Skills, and
- Services - technical and managerial

What is currently done is largely ad hoc. There is not yet a general consciousness of the prospect of continuous transfers of such resources through organized projects and programs, supported by intermediaries on both sides. This lack of consciousness is a result of the fact that this is not part of the mindset of the Caribbean immigrants who have had to focus, of necessity,

on more immediate concerns and priorities. More importantly, however, it can be explained by the lack of facilitating mechanisms, which they can trust to "deliver the goods." Past failures and indiscretions have resulted in healthy and general skepticism about Caribbean investment projects and patriotic schemes.

New modalities have to emerge and find general acceptance, supported by the technological innovations that seem increasingly to make all material things desired, possible.

### **Proposals**

Caribbean nationals living abroad, should be invited to take a fresh look at ways in which knowledge, skills, financial resources, entrepreneurial ability and connections can be mobilized to feed into the development programs of the islands in the sun, providing the new opportunities for employment, income generation and economic security for those in the 'Diaspora' as well as sustainability in the development initiatives of the region.

The following is an indicative list of the initiatives which can be launched or intensified for 'repatriation of skills and resources:

1. Agreement between the Governments of Canada and the Caribbean to provide incentives for programs of skill and technology transfer involving Caribbean nationals, as part of Canada's assistance package;
2. More effective strategies and more active promotion of opportunities for investment in Caribbean based ventures by nationals in Canada; this includes encouraging savings by Caribbean Canadian citizens in Caribbean banking institutions;
3. Public education in the Caribbean and among nationals in Canada aimed at creating a climate of greater mutual acceptance of the potential for contribution of returning Caribbean immigrants to national development; this has to do with self respect and the respect with which we view our own people;
4. Opening doors for secondment of Caribbean expertise from the public sector in Canada to serve medium to long term assignments in the Caribbean public sector;
5. Encouraging Caribbean consulting firms in Canada to make their services available for Caribbean development projects funded under Canadian Government programs;
6. Introducing Summer teaching programs in the Caribbean for Caribbean teachers in the Canadian college system;
7. Facilitating the repatriation of entrepreneurs and viable enterprises which could be located to the Caribbean;
8. Joint economic ventures between Caribbean based development agencies and Caribbean entrepreneurs in Canada for promoting exports of Caribbean products to the Canadian market;
9. Sensitizing Caribbean bureaucrats in the region to the possibilities and the benefits of supporting the efforts of Canadian-Caribbean entrepreneurs, educators and professionals to become more involved in Caribbean development;
10. Creating a Caribbean Center for Development in Canada as the development arm of the Caribbean Embassies, with the mandate to continuously explore and promote Caribbean Development ventures.

### **Immediate Initiative**

A specific initiative should be taken to launch the policy. Since attracting "foreign" investment

is a priority, an attractive project should be identified (possibly tourism related) for promotion among nationals abroad. A full prospectus should be prepared on the project to be widely promoted with the assistance of the ECCB, as the first joint venture between a Government and overseas nationals.

*(Michael White)*

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