

## ***The Importance of the Caribbean Diaspora to Economic Development***

by Hon. P. J. Patterson

### Information and Communication Technologies

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is one of the major determinants of productivity enhancements and hence of international competitiveness. ICT data on the Caribbean and several comparative countries indicate that the Caribbean for the most part is substantially behind in the use of ICTs.

For example, in the English-speaking Caribbean in 2005, the average number of internet users per thousand was less than half that of Hong Kong and Singapore, Japan, UK and the US. The average number of computers per 1000 of population in the foregoing countries was almost five times that in the Caribbean.

One of the challenges for the Caribbean is to close this technological gap. The Diaspora, especially those with considerable experience in ICT development, should be encouraged to invest in the sector as internet service providers, disseminators of new ICT technologies, etc.

This is a very dynamic area of development and the demand in the Caribbean and elsewhere will continue apace. The Diaspora can act as a conduit for U.S. outsourcing to the Caribbean, including industries such as informatics.

### E-Commerce

There has been an explosive development of e-commerce, the production, distribution, marketing, sales or delivery of goods by electronic means.

Growth in Internet sales in the U.S. is substantially outpacing traditional retail sales, albeit starting from a smaller base. Internet sales were estimated at approximately 2% of all U.S. sales in 2004. It was estimated that approximately 80 million shopped online in 2005. While business to consumer transactions seem relatively small, business to business e-commerce transactions are estimated at more than US\$1 trillion internationally and growing.

Those among the Diaspora who have been involved in e-commerce abroad possess the advantage of substantial technical and other experience which can be a tremendous asset in the establishment of such industries. Since e-commerce in the Region is still very much in a fledgling state, there are considerable opportunities to explore.

### Corporate Outsourcing

Outsourcing is a market which will most likely continue to grow rapidly as

international competition intensifies, forcing companies, particularly in the industrialized countries, to constantly seek least-cost options.

This new market opportunity constitutes an export service industry, thereby helping the Region to escape the constraints of high transport and other infrastructure costs which have hitherto compromised the Region's competitiveness.

The range of outsourcing activities is wide and growing. It includes the provision of information service systems, accounting, book-keeping, payroll services, call centres, answering services, telemarketing, computer system design and related services, data processing, internet publishing and broadcasting, software publishing, financial research, health services/medicine (for example, medical transcription), etc. India, Malaysia, Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia, China and others are participating very successfully in the outsourcing market.

We need to get our full share.

#### Cultural and Entertainment Product Development

Sir Arthur Lewis, an Economic Nobel Laureate, once asserted:

*“Music, literature and art are as important a part of the heritage of mankind as are science and morals. They differ from science in that they do not represent what is, but are products of the creative imagination. They have therefore infinite scope for variation.”*

The Caribbean has considerable foundation in the creative sector. The sector presents tremendous opportunities to develop sustainable business in production and promotion of the various intellectual products and offers the possibility to position the country as one of, if not, the most dynamic exciting creative hub worldwide.

We enjoy name recognition, global appeal and competitive market advantage internationally based on the strength of our music and cultural products.

Out of Trinidad and Tobago has come the only new musical instrument of the 20th Century – the melody of the steel band.

*“Reggae is probably the only music not of European or American origin which can be heard in every country on earth and is arguably the first example in modern times of a third world country exporting its culture to such a diverse audience.”*

Yet somehow, the advantage has not translated into prosperity for the region as a whole; has not given rise to quality entertainment in the crucial tourist industry; has not engendered community cultural tourism; and has not realized its potential for attracting substantial investment and foreign exchange earnings beyond individual gain.

In general the cultural and entertainment industry has remained underinvested. Even where investments are evident, they are not large enough and lack the integrated network linkages.

They are too narrowly focused and lacking the partnerships required to achieving the economic scale necessary to establish a competitive base capable of influencing and competing in the global environment.

According to Dr. Keith Nurse, “The region’s contribution to the global arts and entertainment sector, particularly popular music, past colonial literature, visual arts and carnival festivals, has been very significant for several decades. The Caribbean is not lacking in talent or product, yet the cultural industries are plagued by weaknesses in artistic professionalism, manufacturing quality, merchandise packaging, marketing and distribution and copyright protection. The involvement of members of the diasporic community in the ‘cultural industries’ will help to bring the kind of professionalism which is required in their area.

The Creative sector remains one of the fundamental platforms for creating gainful employment for our young people.

Opportunities for participation in the arts provide young people with avenues to achieving similar rewards, and the arts can serve as a potent antidote to the venom of violence that presently poisons the entire society.

Position cultural products and services through linkages that assist the growth of the Tourism product through direct actions in the originating markets where the larger percentage of the Tourism economy exists. These products would possess a high content of local indigenous cultural and creative content.

Develop Joint Ventures with international production and distribution concerns built on the active trade that already occurs within the Caribbean Music Industry but critically targeting the vast Diaspora market.

Tie this into the idea of the broader African Diaspora and develop the linkages to produce television driven products aimed at this potential huge worldwide market inspired by the African heritage and continental potential and population.

Develop a sports festival incorporating the music and cultural components. This could build on special invitational track meets to create a week of activities in celebration of our tremendous athletics branding, football programme, as well as netball and other sports.

In our recent Report to the West Indies Cricket Board on the Governance of West Indies cricket, we drew attention to the spread of the game in North America. We see good possibilities for attracting sponsorship and Media coverage for the shorter version of the game. Here is another chance for members of the Diaspora to help in devising special marketing strategies for the U.S.A.

### A Huge Investment Sector

The Caribbean Diaspora represents a huge potential investment sector to drive the significant capital investments required. Investments in infrastructure, performance centres, theatres, sound stages, and also in capitalizing the necessary corporate entities to be able to finance the developments and facilitate the creation of products both live and for television.

The Special Diaspora Bond, about which I spoke earlier, could spawn a venture capital window for creative sector development activities throughout the Region.

Supporting a publicly traded company to develop and promote cultural products and events as well as owning and managing key entertainment sports and related activities in the Stadia we built for Cricket World Cup 2007.

Develop Homecoming products as viable business models tied to major community festivals and integrated with the demonstration of the unique brands of each parish as well as of each island.

### Power and Influence

The West Indian Diaspora communities constitute a formidable force for the advancement of Caribbean interests in their host countries. The continuing flow of people from the Caribbean has set the stage for the formation of special interest groups with strong transnational agendas and objectives. The importance of the diasporic community in lobbying special interest on behalf of the Caribbean must not be under-estimated in the regional quest for economic development.

Let your voices be heard loudly and clearly on issues that are of major importance in your adopted homeland, or which affect your relatives at home.

Your increasing political strength can provide precious negotiating leverage for Caribbean Nations in the global and hemispheric arena. We live in nobody's backyard. We are not squatters.

We are 15 countries which constitute a formidable voting bloc in Hemispheric Negotiations. Our votes and voices often make the difference in the U.N.

You have been invited to strengthen the political capacity of the U.S. based Caribbean Diaspora through the operation of a national Political Action Committee, with access and input at the federal level of the U.S. Government.

Members of the Diaspora are well attuned to the external variables which affect Caribbean Development. The abundance of your expertise places you in a strong position to influence decision-making in the metropolises where global policies are formulated.

You can help to establish the identity of the Caribbean Region so that we are not lost, or forgotten, in the wider grouping of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The two-way flow of constant and reliable information is essential to achieving any of this.

As the 1992 Report of the West Indian Commission stated: “We must treat the men, women and children of the Diaspora as West Indians all, far from home but close at heart.”

We must aggressively search for Caribbean investors living abroad – whether they bring financial or human capital.

Our bureaucracy needs to be totally re-oriented for this to take place. It is unlikely that investment opportunities will be exploited by the Diaspora, despite a favourable investment climate, unless we are more persistent and better organized in terms of putting potential investors in contact with our various sectors and development Institutions.

### Conclusion

The connection between Caribbean nationals at home and Caribbean nationals living outside of the geographical space of the Caribbean has remained firm, but has gotten far more compelling. The modern revolution in transportation and communication has made space and distance almost a thing of the past.

Territorial considerations are now subordinate to what is called ‘transnationalism’. Caribbean nationals are a transnational people in the sense that they are not restricted to territory but defined by culture across territories. This cultural bond facilitates cross-border business linkages. It is incumbent on the stakeholders to put in place the necessary policies and programmes to facilitate economic development.

The importance of the Caribbean Diaspora in the economic development of the Caribbean goes without saying. We can be mutually enriched by forging an inseparable partnership. In fact, it is the best way of demonstrating that, “all a wi a one.”

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**Lecture by the Most Hon. P. J. Patterson, former Prime Minister of Jamaica given at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture , NY, November 3, 2007 on the occasion of the 4th Annual CIN Caribbean Lecture.**

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