

## **THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE**

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**"And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou art a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot only" – Joshua 17:17**

The seventh Caribbean Media Exchange on Sustainable Tourism (CMEx), mounted by Counterpart International and hosted by the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, took place just over a week ago in Nassau. The theme was “Exploring Niche Markets for Caribbean Tourism”. There was much exciting interactive dialogue stimulated by interventions by many panelists on topics such as ‘Strategies for targeting the African American market’, ‘**Involvement of the Diaspora**’, ‘The Role of Black Media’, ‘Institutional arrangements’, Targeting Niche Markets other than the African American’, and ‘Focused product development’.

There were keynote presentations on ‘The Asian American market’; ‘Thinking Through the Business of Tourism’ by Spirit Airlines, a low cost carrier (LCC) and a major sponsor of CMEx; ‘Ethics in Communications’; ‘The Faith Community: A Higher Calling’; ‘Creating Wealth through Culture’; and ‘Tourism Sustainability’. It was an excellent networking and relaxing experience, especially on island tours, courtesy of the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism. Visiting participants had Caribbean and non-Caribbean roots and currently reside in London, North America and the Caribbean.

The eighth CMEx will be held in Puerto Rico from February 9 to 13, 2006 and the theme will be ‘Sustainable Development: a Balancing Act’. CMEx originated in Ocho Rios, Jamaica in October 2001 and has been complemented by shorter one-day versions (CMExPress), in Kingston, Trinidad & Tobago, Antigua, Dominican Republic and New York.

One of the sessions in Nassau focused on the future of CMEx. The organizers of CMEx had received many favourable comments on the primary objective of CMEX, improvement of the quality of journalism in the tourism sector in the Caribbean. It was felt, however, that CMEx should now move to a higher level.

It was recognized that the diligent pursuit of the social partnership model is an optimal strategy towards the objective of sustainable development and that the media should be included in the social partners to act as a catalyst in the achievement of the objective. The role of the government is to provide regulatory and service functions, the role of the private sector is to do business, the role of the Trade Unions is to induce harmony between employer and employee to achieve greater productivity for fair compensation and the role of NGOs is to support the other social partners by mobilizing volunteers and garnering grant support from benevolent sources.

**The most important entity in any nation is its people.** (*My comment: Both resident and those in the Diaspora*). The government of any given country is elected by its people and therefore has a mandate to pursue its regulatory and service functions on behalf of the people. The people

“hath great power” in the sense that they can change the government, based on the provisions of the constitution of the nation. In the Caribbean, the people have the opportunity to do this once every five years or less. In the interim, the major opposition party is expected, in the interest of the people, to shadow the various portfolios of government and to keep the government on its toes.

In some countries the social partnership is strong. Private sector entrepreneurship is alive and well and the private sector therefore leads economic growth with the government and the unions providing a user-friendly enabling environment. As we move towards the other end of the spectrum where, the government, the opposition, the private sector and/or the unions are weak. Then sustainable economic growth is at risk.

Over this spectrum from strong social partnership at one end to weak social partnership at the other, there is the opportunity for the mass media to enhance the lot of the people. The mass media are ideally positioned to effectively communicate with the people through strategies of investigative journalism. Have you ever noticed how politicians quickly respond to front page headlines on issues which they perceive to be a threat to their power base? **Why then isn't the media stronger in terms of checks and balances in the system of democracy which we practise, so that the interest of the people will be well served?** The media, in response to this, intimates that their resources are weaker than they would like and that the media bosses may be more focused on profitable enterprise than on social partnership responsibility.

**NGOs, in their capacity of social partner, can assist the media in garnering information in their areas of special focus and feeding it to the media. (My comment: The responsibility of NGO's like the DAAS, others in the Diaspora and our local institutions is clear)** In this way the media can be more informed and up to date on issues of national concern. Regular press releases on important issues can then be presented by the NGOs to the media for publication and the media can strengthen the position by their own prolificacy.

The CMEx responsibility is to provide high level networking opportunities for media professionals and to encourage them to inform the people on all issues so as to keep the other social partners on their toes. The media may then be seen as the Internal Auditor for the social partnership, with reporting responsibilities directly to the people through the press. In this way the lot of the great people of the Caribbean may be enhanced.

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