

THE SYSTEMS APPROACH

by

[Dr. Basil Springer, GCM](#)

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" - Romans 8:31.

24 MARCH 2008 - In 1977, I made what some thought was the brave step of abandoning the security of University tenure, as a Biometrician, and establishing a business on my own. For me it was what I wanted to do next and I prepared myself as best as I could for it. After four courses at the Barbados Institute of Management & Productivity and two courses under the Certified General Accountants' programme, I was ready to embark on my business career. My nine years' previous working experience was in Statistical, Information and Computing Systems, albeit applied to agriculture, and it seemed sensible to build on this base and offer my services as a consultant in this sector. Not surprisingly the registered business name under which I plied my trade was SINCOS Consultants.

It was during an interview with the late Carolyn Barrow, wife of the late Rt. Excellent Errol Barrow, who was working at the predecessor organisation to STARCOM Network at that time, when she asked "Basil, do you realise how many times you have used the word 'systems' in this interview?" I was not surprised at the question but enquired as to its significance. She advised that in marketing a business you needed to brand it and proposed SYSTEMS as the brand to be developed. The rest is history. The brand was established around the Caribbean, the business name evolved from the Systems Group in 1977 to Systems Caribbean Limited in 1984 until the business was sold in 2000 when its name was changed to Systems Consulting Limited by the new owners.

Mrs. Barrow further suggested that I should have a word with the then Governor of the Central Bank Dr. Courtney Blackman and ask him to be the feature speaker at the opening of the business. So said, so done. Dr. Blackman was very supportive of this new business to the extent that we were hired to computerise the Central Bank and remained consultants subsequently. Incidentally, the current Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance, Senator Darcy Boyce, was appointed the first IT manager for the Bank arising out of our intervention.

In 1982, Dr. Blackman presented me with a book called "The Systems Approach" by C. West Churchman. This was the first non-technical study of the space-age science that was revolutionising management and planning in government, business, industry and human problems at that time. It is still relevant today.

The Systems approach and systems thinking gives rise to concepts such as the Smart Partnership philosophy, the Social Compact and Holistic Sustainable Development. It

implies interactive dialogue and engenders integrated relationships from which one derives the benefits of synergy from the interaction of various elements in a system.

As we promote the partnering of stakeholders in the interest of harmonious development, we must ensure that the partnership is, indeed, a smart partnership. The ten factors which are necessary to distinguish between a partnership and a smart partnership are a shared vision, cultural diversity, a code of ethics, trust, longevity, networks, transparency, equity, fair play and values. These factors are indeed a generic template irrespective of the partners who are interested in establishing a smart partnership. If one or more factors are weak then it will frustrate the attempt at a smart partnership.

The Social Compact is a partnership primarily between Government, the Private Sector and the Trade Unions. Prime Minister David Thompson has stated recently that efforts will be undertaken to expand the tripartite grouping to bring into the fold other significant actors who have a genuine interest in the work of the group.

He made mention of the myriad of challenges for countries such as ours, which he said could only be dealt with through social dialogue and partnerships. These, he maintained, are vital mechanisms for locating areas of agreement and shared commitment, which would result in successful policy formulation and implementation.

"It will therefore be crucial for the Social Partnership to work not only harder but smarter. I believe that it will be necessary for the Social Partnership to restructure itself, in order to focus its attention on macro socio-economic issues. It will need to ensure that it includes, within itself, the capacity and capability to deal with the many profound and varied issues with which it may be confronted from time to time. This suggests to me that the Social Partnership will need to be strengthened and adequately resourced if it is to be a meaningful tool," he stated.

So great was his belief in and commitment to the Social Compact that, to facilitate all of this, he promised to provide the Compact with a fully functional and well-staffed Secretariat.

He noted that while the conditions under which the Social Partnership first came to being no longer exist, there is still a need to improve on the structures of governance, to ensure that the marginalised are heard and efforts are made to allow them to develop to their fullest possible potential.

Holistic Sustainable Development ensures that economic, spiritual, social, cultural and physical components of the environment evolve in harmony with each other for the benefit of posterity.

Greetings to all at this Easter time and remember: "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

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