



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Caribbean on the Edge; Rising Above the Orthodoxy of Development Thinking

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FEATURE ADDRESS

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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Salutations

- Professor Brian Copeland- Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal UWI, St Augustine
- Professor Jessica Byron- Director, Institute of International Relations UWI, St Augustine
- Professor Emeritus, Compton Bourne, Professors, Members and Academia, Members of the Mclntyre family, Symposium Organizing Committee and Distinguished participants.
- Specially invited Guests and Distinguished participants
- Members of the media,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Morning

It is a great honour, on behalf of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, to deliver the feature address at today's opening ceremony on the Symposium; *"The Caribbean on the Edge: Rising Above the Orthodoxy of Development Thinking."*

The Institute of International Relations and the wider University of the West Indies (**which has been placed among the top five universities in the world**) stand at the forefront in understanding regional integration in the Caribbean and is itself a shining example of the success of Caribbean regionalism and cooperation. I therefore wish to recognize the Institute's commitment to enhancing our understanding of the Caribbean reality as demonstrated by the hosting of this event.

Symposiums such as these are important to facilitate exchanges of ideas and perspectives among academics, policy makers, the private sector and international organizations, so that together, possible approaches and solutions to the region's development challenges can be found. I say all this in the context of us being relatively young nations.

Sir Alister McIntyre

It is fitting from the outset of my remarks to pay tribute to today's honoree, an instrumental West Indian regionalist, Sir Alister McIntyre. A highly celebrated intellectual who was considered one of the great socio-economic thinkers of his time, he piloted the movement for integration as Secretary-General of CARICOM from 1974-1977, and as Vice Chairman of the West Indian Commission. He was a vanguard in the development of economic theory and practice in the region, with his work having inspired generations of students, politicians, academics and those dedicated to the idea of a viable and vibrant Caribbean.

His contribution to the Caribbean is an invaluable one that is both recognized and acclaimed globally, and the region will forever remain indebted to him.

Development thought, Economic Policy Directions and the Practice of Development.

In the preamble to the programme of this Symposium, the question was posed: “*Could the Caribbean stand up to recurring risks ahead and forge a confident pathway for sustainable development?*”

To that, I say a resounding, yes.

For far too long people both within and outside the region have somewhat restricted the possibilities of Caribbean economies due to the diversities, limitations in terms of land, labour and economies of scale, and the economic models that that were pursued. These limitations have largely influenced the developmental models of the past and resulted in a belief that the Caribbean and its people are destined to a fate that is determined and dictated by others.

Ladies and gentlemen, for us to depart from orthodox development thinking, we must first reflect on our origins and examine some of the initial Caribbean perspectives and approaches which defined the nature of the political economy of the region in the last 50 years or so.

Coming to mind are intellectuals such as George Beckford, Kari Levitt and Lloyd Best who characterized the Caribbean as a Plantation Economy. Sir Arthur Lewis’ *Industrialization by Invitation* model also influenced and shaped economic policy making in the past. Its tenet of attracting foreign direct investment to develop infant industries is still a widely used economic policy today. Lewis believed industrialization demanded positive and intelligent action by governments.

Globalization has positively changed the dynamics of Caribbean economies and the countries of the region are now more integrated into the international economy. From foundations built on the plantation economy, the Caribbean economy had traditionally relied on one or a few limited export sectors for economic growth and development in the past.

However, the Region has since advanced and some of the economies have transformed to some extent but certainly not enough away from traditional sectors into the production of higher value added goods and services that are in high demand in many parts of the world. Several of our economies have developed internationally competitive sectors in areas such as energy, tourism, manufacturing etc. However, there are those, admittedly that have remain challenged.

Today, we understand that development is an all-encompassing concept, marked not only by improving the economic welfare, but by improving the standard of living. In that regard, Governments see the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a road map for emerging economies like ours in the Caribbean to achieve more than economic development, but sustainable development.

From that standpoint, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has integrated the SDGs in its overarching national development plan the *National Development Strategy 2016-2030- Vision 2030*.

Similarly, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) has embraced a more all-encompassing approach to development with the completion of a new Trinidad and Tobago Trade Policy (TTTP) 2019-2023.

At its core, the TTTP 2019-2023 seeks to shift Trinidad and Tobago away from its dependence on the export of a single product. Accordingly, the TTTP will serve as a roadmap to change this reality by increasing the production and export of higher value-added goods and services from industries in which the country has comparative advantages.

To move away from the concentration on a few export markets, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will continue to target the wider Caribbean, as well as South American, Central American, Asian and European economies for export expansion in the first instance. Our analysis has revealed that significant underutilized trade potential exists in markets in CARICOM as well as Latin America, the EU and in Asia, including India, China and the ASEAN bloc. There is also potential in the USA, as a result of the large Caribbean diaspora that exists in that country. The government will seek to take advantage of these opportunities.

Moreover, the TTTP introduces for the first time in any Trinidad and Tobago Trade policy issues such as Green Industries, a new dynamic sector for Trinidad and Tobago which provides opportunities to develop a green industrial value chain. Developing the Green sector will help the country achieve environmentally friendly and sustained growth, as well as, jobs.

The TTTP will also address several complementary sector-specific policies and strategies, some of them are also new to a Trinidad and Tobago trade policy. These sector-specific policies include, innovation; global value chains and clustering; gender and the youth; the role of the private sector; use of bi-lateral agreements; physical and quality infrastructure; investment and export promotion; human capital; trade finance; intellectual property rights; trade and the environment; industrial relations; and e-Commerce

Impact of Technology

Ladies and gentlemen, there are several developments in the international economy which we must be able to exploit to spur a new era of economic growth in the region. Technology is around us, in us, and a part of us. It has moved us from one Industrial Revolution to another, first using water and steam power, then electric power, and then electronics and information technology to transform our modes and scope of production.

Now with the Fourth Industrial Revolution at hand, which fuses the physical, digital and biological worlds, impacts all disciplines, economies and industries, and even challenges the idea about what it means to be human, we have no choice but to change. Our new models of development must take into consideration the role of technology and the new models of business that are currently transforming everything around us.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago recognizes that in abandoning orthodox development thinking, we must acknowledge the instrumental role Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) play in today's global economy and in achieving our development objectives. Recognizing this, the GORTT is currently implementing the National E-commerce Strategy which was approved by Cabinet in 2018 and which aims to create an enabling environment that facilitates and promotes e-commerce for local business to serve domestic and international consumer markets.

The Political Economy of Integration and Convergence

Global events have led us to take a critical look at our own integration movement and integration agenda. This analysis must look at regional convergence in the context of the Caribbean's integration into the global economy, as well as its impact on regional industrial structures and the variances in income and development amongst our economies.

CARICOM Member States are forging ahead with the deepening and strengthening of our Community while doing the work of re-designing the structures and processes that underpin it. This will allow for greater convergence and help chart the direction for new integration frontiers. In the context of trade development, the re-design is happening with the review of the Common External Tariff (CET); the review of the Rules of Origin and the restructuring of the Oils and Fats Regime to mention a few areas. It is also evident in the work being done across the region to improve the free movement of persons and to upgrade the regulations, systems and procedures that support this free movement.

Capital Flows and Financing in the Region

Admittedly over the last decade, there would have appeared to be some slowing in our country arrangements, or maybe even some questioning, however, as a frequent visitor to the COTED and certainly with the commitment expressed by Heads, the future for our region is filled with promise and we continue to work at it for the benefit for the people in the region.

One area where our region faces significant threats to our survivability is capital flows and financing. Skewed distribution of foreign investment – among countries, regions and sectors promote volatility of capital flows and in financing. While globalization has led to greater mobility of capital, not all countries and regions have been equal recipients. The role of capital flows and access to external financing and international debt markets is part of the development question for Caribbean states.

Climate Change

The stark reality for the Caribbean and all Small Island Developing States (SIDS), however, is that global issues inevitably become very real, local problems. In the case of climate change, SIDS are disproportionately affected and the effects can be catastrophic, setting back countries and entire regions decades of growth and development.

The recent havoc inflicted by Hurricane Dorian to the Northern Bahamas islands, Abaco and Grand Bahama once more underscores the need for a more integrated policy framework and strategy to mitigate the effects of climate change in order to alleviate the economic implications for Caribbean countries. It is also imperative for countries to adhere to their commitments to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change which the Caribbean has been at the forefront in promoting.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, the region does in fact have very good economic potential and growth opportunities. In particular, the Caribbean has an educated, multilingual workforce and sophisticated financial systems, and is a short hop to many of the region's export markets and trading partners in North America and Latin America. The region has great potential to further develop its manufacturing, services, logistics, agriculture, creative and digital sectors. As countries we must therefore remain committed to regionalism as we aim to individually and collectively achieve sustainable development. The evolving global space provides an opportunity for us to explore and adopt new and practical approaches for Caribbean diplomacy and integration.

In a time of rising economic nationalism and protectionist sentiments, Caribbean countries must remain committed to the cause as we progress towards achieving sustainable development. Perhaps now is the chance to demonstrate to the world that, yes, economic integration can not only survive but thrive. The thematic areas covered in this symposium are not only timely but also critical to development in the region. These are all areas where regional governments are placing increased emphasis in an attempt to deliver to Caribbean citizens the kind of policies and measures needed for development. As we contemplate new and unorthodox development thinking, we hope that new and innovative ideas will emerge. Are we to remain on edge or are we on the edge of a new dawn, the brink of a new order of the day where the Caribbean is ahead of the curve? I urge you to keep this in mind during the next two days here at the symposium.

Thank you very much.