

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page consists of three blue circles of varying sizes and two thin blue lines. One line starts from the top left and extends towards the center, passing through the top-left edge of the largest circle and the top-left edge of the middle circle. The second line starts from the top right and extends towards the center, passing through the top-right edge of the largest circle and the top-right edge of the middle circle. The bottom-most circle is partially cut off by the bottom edge of the page.

Civil Society and Sustainable Caribbean Development: Initial Discussion Paper the 3rd Conference on Small Island Developing (SIDS 2014)

Civil Society Consultative Working Group

This paper highlights the positions of Caribbean civil society on the major issues to be considered at the 2014 SIDS Conference.

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Caribbean Civil Society Consultative Working Group: Discussion Paper

1. Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/207 authorised the convening of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in 2014. The intent for ‘**effective**’ inclusion of civil society in the preparatory process and conference is clearly stated by Paragraph 21 of the resolution, which stresses:

“the need for the effective participation of civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations and other major groups, and invites voluntary contributions to support the participation of major groups of developing countries, in particular small island developing States, in the regional and international preparatory processes and the Conference itself;”

In this context, the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) convened a Civil Society Consultative Working Group (CSCWG) to mobilise Caribbean civil society participation in the preparatory meetings in 2013 and the Conference in 2014. The CSCWG is comprised of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) representing five of the nine Major Groups identified in Agenda 21¹.

This initial discussion Paper is presented by the CSWG to firstly provide a draft perspective and common positions on the key issues to be discussed in the SIDS + 20 process. Secondly, it argues for improving civil society participation in the sustainable development processes in the Caribbean, and specifically calls for the establishment of institutional modalities for the inclusion of civil society in national, regional and interregional mechanisms designed to facilitate the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) and the Mauritius Strategy for further Implementation of the BPOA. In so doing, the discussion paper also provides a basis for continued discussion on how Caribbean civil society can be more engaged in the 20 year review and any follow actions to be derived therefrom.

2. Contextualising Caribbean Civil Society Participation in Sustainable Development

CSOs have always played a role in the development of Caribbean communities, though traditionally that role was limited mainly to community volunteer efforts. Over the past three decades, the characteristics and work of the civil society sector in the Caribbean has evolved, particularly since, and in line with, the evolution of the global environment and development agenda.

Increased recognition of, and support to, social actors in shaping and delivering development services at various scales resulted in the proliferation of community-based organizations, environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and NGOs focused on the development process itself. CSOs are no longer staffed primarily by volunteers, with the sector hiring large numbers of full-time professional and support staff, and managing relatively large projects.

Increasingly, Caribbean CSOs are playing a range of roles, independently or in partnership with government and other actors as:

- **Service providers:** delivering services to meet societal needs such as education, health, food and security, community economic development; implementing natural resource management; undertaking disaster management, preparedness and emergency response, especially at the community level
- **Experts:** bringing unique knowledge and experience to shape policy and strategy, and identifying and building solutions on social, economic and environmental issues
- **Capacity builders:** providing education, training and other capacity building via informal as well as formal programmes for a wide range of target audiences and using a diverse set of capacity building approaches including innovative use of information and communication technologies
- **Representatives:** giving power to the voice of the marginalized or under-represented, including poor communities and resource users who are otherwise excluded from decision-making processes
- **Watchdogs:** holding governments to account, promoting transparency and accountability
- **Advocates:** raising awareness of societal issues and challenges and advocating for change, including on a range of sustainable development issues
- **Innovators:** leading on new and emerging issues such as green economy, sustainable consumption and production, and renewable energy

When the training, research and development, and other technical services provided by academic institutions and CSOs is taken into account, the conceptualisation of the civil society sector that emerges is not an amalgam of groups that are beneficiaries of social programmes, but a distinct sector comprised of social enterprise actors. In this context, the civil society sector is often referred to as the Third Sector, joining government and the private sector as a critical arm in the development process.

3. Constraints to Effective Participation

In spite of this expanded role of CSOs as social enterprises, and recognition of the need for involvement of the sector in national and regional development processes, there are still constraints to the full and effective participation of civil society in development initiatives in the Caribbean.

While there have been some efforts at inclusion, the contribution by civil society to community, national, and regional development is still currently treated by some governments and multilateral institutions as tangential to the development process. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/288 (The Future We Want) recognizes the necessity for civil society to be fully engaged in the development process.

“We recognize that opportunities for people to influence their lives and future, participate in decision-making and voice their concerns are fundamental for sustainable development. We underscore that sustainable development requires concrete and urgent action. It can only be achieved with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and the private sector, all working together to secure the future we want for present and future generations.” (Paragraph 13)

While governments have embraced, and applied, the idea of public-private partnerships, they have been reluctant to embrace the idea of public-civil society partnerships. The maintenance of the constraints to participation in analysis, design, and implementation processes is contrary to globally accepted concepts, frameworks, and principles of good governance. More importantly, it continues to marginalise an entire sector that routinely contributes to social and economic development, a contradiction that Caribbean countries can no longer afford to perpetuate.

CSOs face a number of constraints in providing the current levels of services to their various constituencies. Constraints are faced both through institutions that hinder rather than enable CSO engagement as well as capacity limitations within civil society, often as a result of limited or the unavailability of resources for the development of strong and sustainable CSOs.

Unless Caribbean countries can reduce their debt obligations, CSOs will increasingly bear the burden of providing social services. In that context, it becomes more urgent for governments to embrace increased participation by the civil society sector in national development planning and the regional and global inter-governmental processes.

The effective implementation of the BPOA and (MSI) requires the elaboration of a governance and institutional framework which is built on the best practices of civil society participation.

4. A Call for Action

This discussion paper identifies a number of actions intended to address key issues in the BPOA and MSI. In particular, it identifies increased engagement of civil society as critical to the process.

4.1 Governance

The outcomes report from the Third International Conference on Sustainable Development (The Future We Want) provides a framework for the Post-2015

development agenda, and is endorsed as United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/288. Section IIC, paragraphs 42-55, provides guidance on how governments and inter-governmental agencies should engage “Major Groups and other stakeholders”.

There are opportunities for participation by civil society at both national and regional levels, but more often than not, the mechanisms are few, and the form of participation codified and practised is limited to consultation. The rationale given for limited engagement centres on capacity gaps however, concerns by public organisations regarding the capacity of civil society to participate on a more structured basis can be addressed in much the same way as capacity constraints in the public sector is addressed.

CSOs are located in all the spaces that facilitate the design and delivery of public policy interventions and therefore need to be better linked into these systems. Currently, CSOs act as translators in primarily one direction, translating public policy and development initiatives for community consumption. As we move forward it will become imperative that public policy processes must be designed to facilitate translation in both directions by ensuring that the needs of marginalised groups and communities inform the design and delivery of development initiatives.

In that context, CSOs are not simply constituents to be consulted periodically, but instead should be fully engaged as partners in the development process, from analysis of issues, to decision-making on policies and plans, to implementation of actions, and to evaluation of results.

In order to enhance the effective implementation of the BPOoA and the MSI it is necessary for the elaboration of a governance and institutional framework which is built on the best practices of civil society participation.

Recommendations:

- a. Establishing an institutionalised Major Group Forum which would be given official status to make interventions and inputs into the SIDS 2014 process and follow actions for implementation.
- b. Strengthening international development partnerships not only to support direct government interventions but also to support civil society actions at various levels, including partnerships among CSOs across all SIDS.
- c. Developing an institutional framework (policies, laws, structures, processes) that enables civil society participation in development at the regional, national and local levels.
- d. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs to directly support delivery of services, including through provision of resources, training and exchanges.

4.2 New Development Model

Within the Caribbean, the many attempts to diversify national economies have resulted in limited success. Caribbean economies are still essentially single-sector economies,

beset by structural deficiencies and extremely vulnerable to external shocks. The need for a new development model is acknowledged by Caribbean governments, as per the following statement:

“The current global economic crisis calls for a development model that better serves the needs of Caribbean countries.”¹

The Green Economy (and Blue Economy) approach to sustainable development is seen as one framework for designing the new development model that incorporates the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Even that approach will be applied based on regional and national circumstances. That implies a degree of experimentation in the design, and support systems required for application, of public policy processes. However, experimentation necessary during this transition period will require a level of institutional dexterity not common in the public sector, and which may not be desired by internal stakeholders and external partners.

This is an area in which CSOs are already working, and will be able to make substantial contributions to the design and implementation of green economy strategies. Coincidentally, CSOs routinely interact with communities and some of the most vulnerable groups, and their full participation in the analysis, design, and implementation of sustainable development strategies can only improve the chances for success.

Recommendations:

- a. Promoting and supporting CSOs to play a major role in framing the discussion concerning a social compact, designing the process, and facilitating the transition towards a model of development that incorporates the principles of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
- b. Framing a vision for what ‘green/blue economy’ means in the Caribbean SIDS context developed through a participatory process, rather than top-down models.
- c. Supporting CSOs to be active participants in a collaborative approach to the design, testing and evaluation of green/blue economy approaches to transforming economic development.
- d. Promoting and facilitating knowledge exchange across SIDS on green/blue economy approaches.

4.3 Renewed Commitment to the SIDS Agenda

While Caribbean governments have made some strides in their efforts to advance the implementation of the BPOA and the MSI, continuing implementation deficits have further highlighted critical structural and institutional weaknesses. New and emerging issues will also pose a challenge to the ability of Caribbean to SIDS to further implement

¹ Report of the twenty-third session of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, March 15-17, 2010, St. Georges, Grenada (Page 1, paragraph 1).

the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as frame an effective response to the post 2015 Development Agenda.

The UN General Assembly Resolution noted:

“concern that the outcome of the five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy concluded that Small Island Developing States have made less progress than most other groupings, or have even regressed, in economic terms, especially in terms of poverty reduction and debt sustainability, and that sea-level rise and other adverse impacts of climate change continue to pose a significant risk to small island developing States and their efforts to achieve sustainable development”¹ (UN DESA, 2013)

In this context, Caribbean civil society is concerned that the issues and concerns of SIDS are indeed falling off the global agenda. Declining international support for capacity building and implementation of actions suggests that while the specific vulnerabilities of SIDS are noted our specific concerns and situations still remain peripheral to the global development discourse.

Recommendations:

- a. The outcome document of the 3rd International Conference call for the specific inclusion of the SIDS agenda in the post 2015 development agenda and framing of the post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals
- b. The establishment of an inter-regional multi-sectoral task force (including civil society) to advance an action plan to gain renewed international commitments for support for implementation and follow-up actions
- c. Establishment of dedicated funds to support the effective participation of civil society in SIDS to engage in UN processes which advance the sustainable development agenda

5. Civil Society Commitments

While we note the on-going contribution of the sector to the process; we are also cognizant that the sector needs to recommit itself to continually building its capacity in order to scale up its activities and interventions.

We therefore commit to:

- Working in genuine partnership with the public and private sectors as well as within the civil society sector to inform and educate our constituents and the general public on sustainable development issues
- Improving implementation of initiatives which directly address specific sustainable challenges facing Caribbean SIDS
- Contributing to a process which seeks to build multi- sectoral linkages across SIDS
- Increasing our interventions for a just and inclusive green/blue economy framework

- Providing concrete recommendations for the development of a socially, economically and environmentally balanced development framework which highlights issues of the most vulnerable within our societies
- Ensuring that the most vulnerable and often marginalized groups including women, youth, indigenous peoples and the disabled are fully engaged in our deliberations and positions

6. Conclusion

CSOs in the Caribbean have made significant contributions towards advancing the sustainable development agenda and remain committed to working in partnership with governments and other stakeholders to advance the implementation of the BPOA and the MSI. However, greater recognition needs to be accorded to this on-going contribution and the participation of the sector institutionalised throughout the process. The CSCWG will continue to make on-going interventions in the process in an effort to ensure that the perspectives and positions of the sector are inserted into the process.

End Notes

ⁱ The current membership of the CSCWG includes:

Organization	Sector	Area of Focus
Windwards Island Farmers Associations	Farmers (Sub-regional Network)	Sustainable Land Management Green Economy Climate Change
CaFAN	Farmers (Regional Network)	Sustainable Land Management Green Economy Climate Change
Caribbean Network for Integrated Rural Development	Regional Network	Sustainable Land Management
Caribbean Associations for Feminist Research & Action (CAFRA)	(women) Regional Network	Gender and sustainable development
The Aldet Centre	Indigenous (Regional Network)	Indigenous people and sustainable development
Foundation for Development Planning Inc	Non- Governmental	Sustainable Development, Climate Change
Caribbean Women's Association	Gender (Regional Network)	Gender and Sustainable Development
Caribbean Youth Environment Network (CYEN)	Youth (Regional Network)	Youth & sustainable development, climate change
Global Water Partnership	Non- Governmental	Natural Resources
The CARIBSAVE Partnership	Non- Governmental	Climate change environmental sustainability
Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)	Non- Governmental	Green economy, sustainable rural livelihoods, climate change, participatory natural resource management and governance