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TECHNICAL ASPECTS  
OF  
PLANNING IN MONTSERRAT



UNITED NATIONS

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Policy decisions, whether at the regional or national levels, involve a choice among alternatives. Our colonial heritage includes certain common structural constraints which need to be taken into account whenever any effort towards regional planning is made. Each Caribbean island, however, has its own special characteristics; its own special goals; and, therefore, policies at the regional level will have to be broad and formulated along certain lines to incorporate any difference. Only then can they be meaningful to the region as a whole.

Like most other Caribbean islands, Montserrat has had its share of the problems associated with the economic recession of the mid-seventies. After a disappointing growth performance in 1977 and 1978, (GDP = EC\$25.2 million) it has, in 1979, experienced growth in real income estimated at 5 percent (GDP = EC\$26.5 million). This revival of economic activity has been due mainly to an expansion in the construction and tourism sectors.

1. State of Planning

The Montserrat Government's strategy for the 1980s has been crystallized by its awareness of development planning as its surest route to economic progress. It has attempted to assist, influence and direct the island's major economic sectors - Agriculture, Tourism and Industry because of its conviction that a broadly-based economic growth is the most reliable type to pursue.

Planning plays a vital role in any economic process. Montserrat possesses very little known natural resource for exploitation. There is also a shortage of skilled labour

and the economic system operates under a considerable number of constraints. The policy measures of our Government are, therefore, based on its long-term objectives of:-

- (a) realising self-sufficiency as far as possible (especially in terms of import substitution);
- (b) desiring to maximise foreign exchange earnings;
- (c) desiring to achieve full employment for the people of the island.

The Government has formulated a Development Plan 1979-1983, and with the help of the World Bank, has designed a project list which sets out the priority areas for development and the type of assistance that is needed to implement them. It stresses the need for Montserrat to pursue labour-intensive, Agro-based industries. A Manpower Planning Study which was carried out in 1979 with assistance from UNDP analysed the feasibility of the Development Plan in manpower terms and recommended the establishment of labour-intensive projects especially designed for males. This is in view of the high unemployment rate of males - 22 percent when compared to that of females - 13 percent.

The Government Development Plan will require a total expenditure of EC\$35.9 million in 5 years. Montserrat is a Grant-in-Aid island and the intention is to approach donor agencies for assistance which is crucial to the successful implementation of the projects under consideration. These projects could realize a projected economic growth of about 3.3 percent per annum.

## 2. Relationship between Physical, Spatial and Overall Planning

The location of certain important facilities and productive areas influence the Proposed Spatial strategy of the island. A major road connects the airport in the east to the harbour in Plymouth, which is also the major centre of population concentration. The development of agriculture and forestry in the northern part of the island has necessitated the construction of

roads in that area. At present a major road is being constructed to link the northern and eastern ends of the island. This will open up new areas for siting tourism and industrial projects. The intention is to establish four major areas for urban development in Plymouth (Western), Salem (North western), St. John's (Northern) and Harris' (Eastern). These centres will serve the surrounding rural hinterland and help to decentralize both the population and employment opportunities which would otherwise move towards Plymouth.

### 3. Planning the Social Sector

Montserrat's population is approximately 11,250 with a declining birth rate. The number of school children is declining, and according to reports from the Statistical Department, it will drop to about 1,600 pupils in the next ten years. If the pupil/teacher ratio remains constant, by 1988 about 25 teachers will become redundant.

The present shortage and future requirement of skilled manpower emphasizes the need for more secondary and especially technical education. The education authorities are working towards up-grading and expanding these facilities, and, in addition, towards providing Junior Secondary Education for all children on the island.

In the health sector the authorities are aware of the shortage of trained personnel in the fields of specialized medical services and the need to upgrade the housing conditions of the low-income groups. They have taken action towards improving housing conditions and have given priority attention towards training in the public sector.

### 4. Planning the Transport Sector

In this sector, the construction of roads and improvements to the airport facilities are major projects planned for implementation during the next five years. Feeder roads constructed will link agricultural areas to main roads and will,

therefore, assist in promoting increased agricultural production. The major road under construction between Trants in the east and St. John's in the north will provide an important connection between the airport and the northern parts of the island besides serving potential agricultural and forestry areas.

#### 5. Planning the Agricultural Sector

The Agricultural Development Plan has recently been updated and revised and its objective is to establish a fully commercial agricultural sector with emphasis on fruit trees development and vegetable production. This is proposed to be done by maximum land utilization to increase production and substitute imports. The Government's efforts are being diverted towards acquiring four estates. The intention is to develop the infrastructure; subdivide the lands and lease or sell them to farmers to whom necessary credit is available for providing production inputs. Assistance in research and extension services are being obtained from the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI). The training of extension officers both locally and at regional institutions is being carried on and will be continued under the plan.

It is expected that, with the development of marketing outlets, agricultural production and exports will increase over the next five years. In the livestock department projects are aimed at import substitution. The programmes include rabbit multiplication, sheep breeding, a project aimed at upgrading beef cattle and a dairy project.

In short then, Government's agricultural strategy is aimed at the maximum utilization of land resources and the provision of adequate supporting services to farmers e.g. research, extension, credit and marketing facilities. The benefits expected include the increasing of farm income and a reduction in foreign exchange losses due to a high food import bill.

#### 6. Conclusion

The Government's Strategy for the next five years is geared

towards achieving full employment and improving the income distribution on the island. Despite the constraints under which it operates, in terms of size and lack of natural resources it appears that Montserrat will experience a sustained growth rate over the next few years. To achieve this goal, external assistance in the form of capital grants and soft loans will be crucial. Only with the availability of these can there be any successful implementation of the projects referred to above which have potential for economic growth on the island.

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