CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION COMMITTEE

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THE CARIBBEAN REGION

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Office for the Caribbean

CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION COMMITTEE

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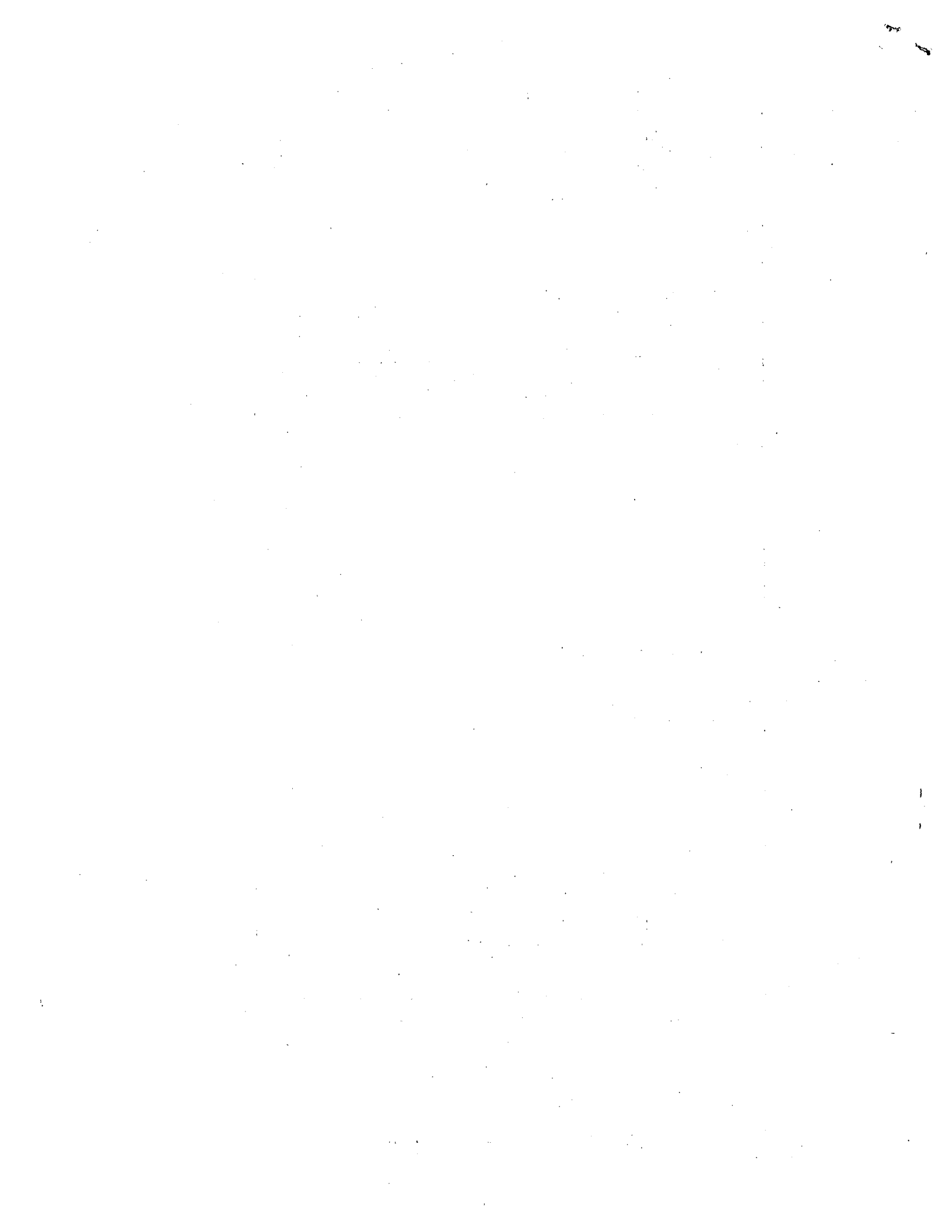Kingston, Jamaica
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REPORT ON THE PROJECT
"SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE CARIBBEAN"

UNITED NATIONS

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The project "Social Structural Changes in the Caribbean" is being pursued in fulfilment of the mandates given by the CDCC member governments at the Second Session in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. It attempts to analyze available historical data in search of the peculiar styles of social development in the Caribbean. It is expected to offer, in the long run, the pattern of social structural changes peculiar to the sub-region and to identify the substantive elements which account for Caribbean identity. Social policies to foster and develop the communalities so identified could then be formulated on a larger number of issues.

The studies were initiated on the smaller and less developed countries, the characteristics of which are not sufficiently known even in Caribbean milieux and which tend to hamper the processes of mutual collaboration and cooperation. In spite of the severe lack of resources at the Secretariat's disposal, the report on Dominica is underway and the one on St. Lucia is completed as far as bibliographical data are concerned. Published materials nonetheless do not offer a sufficient coverage of social developments in the last decades, and field research has to be intensified. A preliminary visit was made to St. Lucia in February this year to explore with key personalities, knowledgeable about the recent social movements, the characteristics of social development in agriculture, entrepreneurial endeavours, urban employment and labour organizations. Further investigations will also embrace archives and local press reports. This research strategy will be applied in the case of Dominica and of Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines which have been programmed.

The slow rate of progress in the completion of the studies is due to a lack of human resources and funds. We are happy to inform that the United Nations University, acknowledging the relevance of this effort, not only for Caribbean social development but for the understanding of popular creativity in the world, granted for 1980 a sum of US$5,000.00 within its current project, "Socio-cultural Development in a Changing World" to assist in carrying out field

research and convening seminars of regional scholars to assess the final
reports.

The study of St. Lucia has attempted to unravel the structure of
social groups and classes and identify the mechanisms of collective
practices which resulted in the emergence of innovative local instituions.
Whereas available historical data usually stresses the role of the elites
in society, which is rarely suitable to former colonial countries in search
of their national identity, the reading of St. Lucia's evolution from the
point of view proposed by the Secretariat has led to the preliminary
conclusions summarized hereunder.

The strategic position of the island bore heavily upon its early
development, as it is known it changed hands fourteen times. The settlers
therefore, lacking constant and clear metropolitan patronage, had to rely,
more than in other plantation societies, on their own resources. On the
one hand, planters establishing themselves there during the XVIII Century
constituted small entrepreneurs in conflict with the establishment of
neighbouring islands and prone to endorse, as they did, metropolitan
revolutionary movements. On the other hand, and as a consequence,
St. Lucie la Fidèle, as it was nicknamed by the revolutionaries, was
endowed with a group of enslaved with more leeway to organize themselves
according to their own interest. This fact is the point of departure in
the process of nation-building in St. Lucia.

Continuous administrative control passed to the British at the
beginning of the XIX Century and they could only cope with the prevalent
precarious social equilibrium through a series of concessions to the creole
society. Imprisoned between the British Empire striving for full control
of internal government - which was only achieved at the end of the XIX Century -
and a "restless" population, the French creoles, as a dominant strata,
stagnated and declined both in numbers and social and economic significance.
Meanwhile, the St. Lucian labour force facing tremendous constraints in
view of the lack of institutionalized channels to air, peacefully, their
grievances and the impossibility of challenging the military predominance
of the colonizers, was forced to find avenues for establishing itself
outside of the situation of wage labour on the plantation or reluctantly

accepted wage labour or a system of compromise, which was adopted in
the mid-XIX Century.

From the XIX Century onwards, a peculiar kind of peasant society
took shape in the country, which must be termed a counter-plantation
system, since its shortcomings derive from areas where the impact of
plantation economy could not be bypassed. The Community Property
system ensured not only the inalienable rights of the population
over the property acquired in most strenuous conditions, it further
kept in check the laws of market economy and made re-possession by
the planters totally impossible. On the other hand, St. Lucians
preserved their own distinctive cultural identity by adhering to their
own language and forcing imported norms and values into the screening
of the basic philosophical and moral values embodied in the referred
language.

This retreat of the core of a small population in constant
intercourse with one of the most powerful empires ever known gave way
to severe urban-rural dichotomies. Urban economic activities developed
initially as a result of St. Lucia's strategic position and the require-
ments of public administration. Modern agriculture evolved under the
aegis of transnational corporations but had to search for a compromise
with traditional peasant sectors.

There emerges then from the analysis of what is available on
St. Lucian history a novel concept of development and social relations
expressed through the numerous movements staged by the population. At
the centre of this St. Lucian formula, one finds a stubborn effort to
protect and salvage a legacy of independence and distinctiveness.
Difficulties to bring into reality the various norms and values embodied
in the local ethos have cornered the bulk of St. Lucians to isolation
and retreat. As a preliminary conclusion, one foresees then that
modernization and development will be viable only if it does not oppose
such legacy. It would appear that innovations called for by the need
to accelerate the process of modernization and development will have
to be submitted to a patient dissemination and discussion with and by
the population, which in turn will most certainly reformulate them to
suit its standpoints. It seems that previous cleavages between the

population and the former colonizers, whose most apparent and outstanding manifestation - bilingualism - survived nearly two centuries, must be reversed in the near future, to abate traditional resistance to induced changes.