

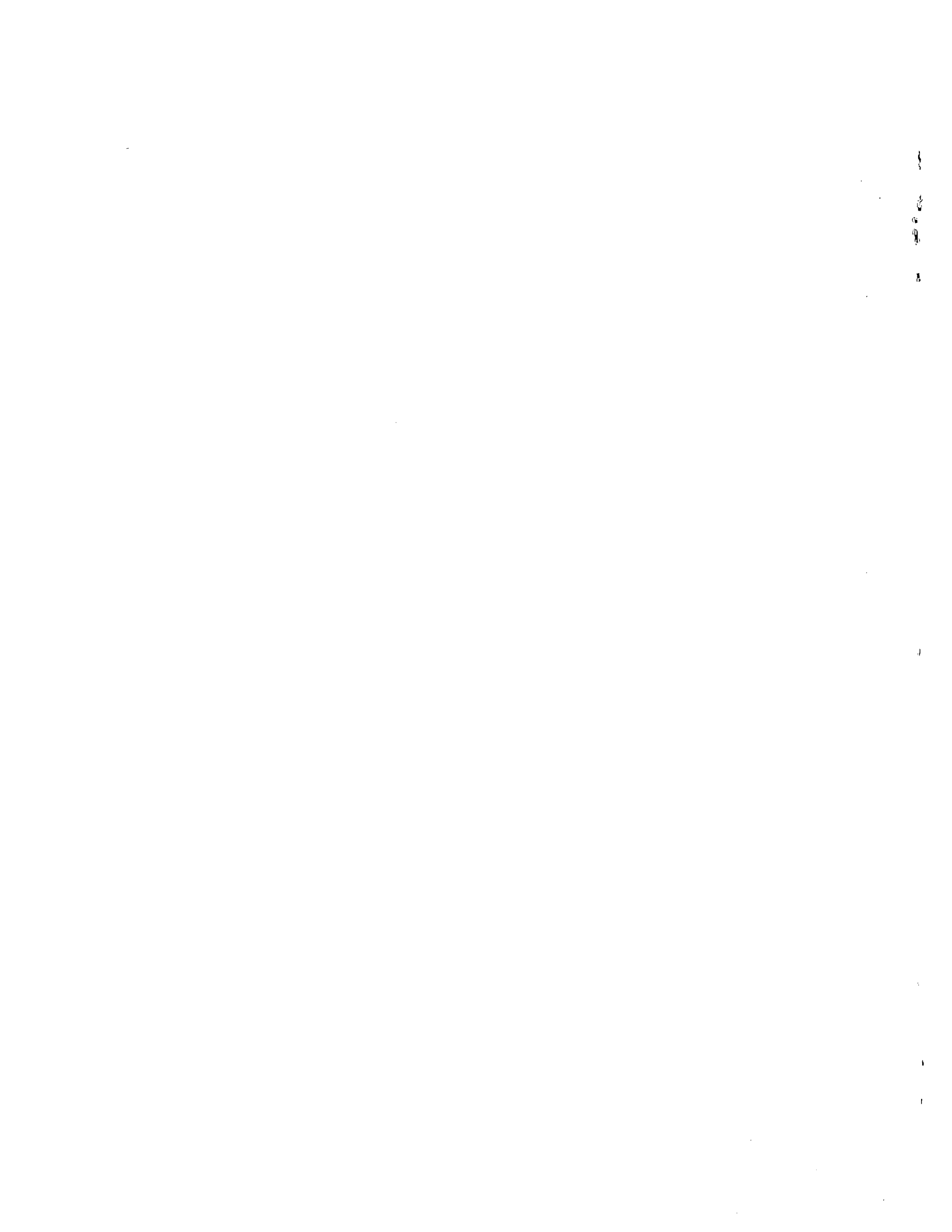
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SOME SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE CARIBBEAN

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## SOME SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

### INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment in 1966, the ECLA Office for the Caribbean has been actively associated with the area governments in their efforts in planning for development. Two regional seminars, one on integrated rural development and the other on strengthening the local institutional machinery for development have been held. Assistance has also been rendered in the establishment and organization of planning units in some territories, and in the inter-governmental negotiations on closer economic co-operation. Based on these experiences and on the findings of continuous research into the economic and social aspects of development in the region, <sup>1/</sup> this paper is presented with a view to acquainting the participants with some special problems encountered by the Caribbean territories in their development process.

It is necessary at the outset to make two prefatory statements. Firstly, this paper does not seek to outline a strategy for development; its modest aim is to highlight some of the historical factors and contemporary trends that impinge on development, and which should be taken into account in preparing projects for technical aid. In this context, problems that are purely political in nature are excluded. Secondly, the term 'development' is used in its widest sense i.e., "raising the whole pattern of living of the population upwards and to create in the process a society which will thereafter be economically and socially dynamic, and a social order in which the population on the whole will have a sense of belonging and meaningful achievement". <sup>2/</sup>

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<sup>1/</sup> Throughout this paper, the term 'region' connotes the Commonwealth Caribbean.

<sup>2/</sup> See the Report of the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Integrated Rural Development, E/CN.12/846, (1969).

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section outlines some special characteristics of the Caribbean socio-economic scene; the second section deals with some discords to development in the region; and the third section enumerates some "gaps" and drawbacks in the fields of plan formulation and implementation.

#### SOME SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CARIBBEAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCENE

The most important and perhaps disquieting feature of the economies of the Caribbean territories is the growing volume of unemployment, despite a statistically satisfying economic performance. As elsewhere in the developing world, the growing unemployment is basically the combined effect of a rapidly increasing population and the use of capital-intensive technology in the main production sectors which are mostly operated by multi-national corporations. This situation is aggravated in the Caribbean by two factors i.e. the dualistic wage structure<sup>3/</sup> and the steady stream of migrants from the rural areas to the urban centres, the latter being partly caused by the former.

The prevalence of very high wage rates in the private sector, particularly in manufacturing and mining, forces the public sector to pay comparable rates which greatly diminishes its capacity to create new jobs. Wage differentials between different sectors is accompanied by very high skill differentials as well. These result in a marked cleavage between different types of workers; at one end is the group of highly paid workers in 'privileged' sectors, and at the other a mass of "lumpen proletariat" composed of persons working on semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, those marginally engaged in agriculture and other traditional occupations, and

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<sup>3/</sup> For a fuller discussion on this, see William G. Demas, The Economics of Development in Small Countries with Special Reference to the Caribbean, McGill University Press, (1965), p. 79.

the virtually unemployable, waiting for even a dead-end job. The organized workers in 'modern' sectors, with their powerful organization and potential to manipulate political power, make it difficult for the governments to introduce corrective measures to narrow the gap.

Creation of a large number of additional jobs by way of labour-intensive public works programmes, even if possible, cannot be an effective and enduring solution either. For, considering the higher wages in the modern sectors, the better conditions obtaining there, and the expectation of obtaining higher skills and further training, the labour force would rather accept the remote chance of a job in these sectors, than going in for jobs with no such prospects. They would thus regard the earnings from employment in 'crash' public works programmes more as an unemployment relief payment.<sup>4/</sup> This results in negative attitudes to work which is more harmful to the society than even the waste of financial resources such programmes entail.

The dualistic wage structure and the influence of some historical and sociological factors have produced a peculiar and highly skewed agricultural sector. There is a dichotomy between the plantation and peasant systems, the former engaged mainly in production of the traditional export crops and the latter on marginal domestic production. For different reasons both systems are characterised by high costs and low productivity; but whilst the plantation system is based on large holdings which are frequently under-utilized, the peasant system suffers from an

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<sup>4/</sup> This 'employment crisis' in the context of the operations of multi-national corporations merits very serious study. Indeed, this crisis is considered to be 'the most dangerous dualism' engendered by the introduction of "modern" technology into developing countries as part and parcel of the process of private foreign investment by large corporations. For a fuller discussion on this theme, see Hans W. Singer, "A New Approach to the Problem of Dual Society in Developing Countries", in International Social Development Review, No. 3, UN publication, Sales No. E.71.IV.9 pp. 23-31.

extreme fragmentation of holdings. <sup>5/</sup> There is also the phenomenon of what is termed "agricultural communities which do not like agriculture" whose attitude has been prejudiced by the archetype of the rural proletariat of the half remembered past. - the plantation worker. The educational system, if anything, has strengthened this prejudice. By and large, education is viewed "primarily as a source of mobility, the means of escaping out of agriculture into professions and skilled urban occupation". <sup>6/</sup>

The growing migration to the metropolitan countries is another important factor to consider. The observation is sometimes made that migration has beneficial effects because it helps relieve unemployment at home and brings sizeable sums of money into the country in the form of migrants' remittances to the relatives left behind. But on a closer look, it would seem that on balance, the effect is harmful. Migration syphons off the better educated and trained persons in the working force of the Caribbean countries because of the immigration standards set by the developed countries who claim that they are in the 'international market of brains'. Moreover sustained and steady migration adversely affects the age composition of the migrants' countries. It is evident that those who leave the country to take up jobs elsewhere are among the more active and younger sections of the working force. This results in a preponderance of the old and the very young, thus pushing up the dependency ratio. <sup>7/</sup>

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<sup>5/</sup> In the Caribbean territories, on an average, farms in the size '100 plus' acres, whilst accounting for less than 10% of the total number of farms contain nearly 55% of the total farm land area. On the other hand, whilst the 'less than five acres' group constitutes about 79% of the total holdings it accounts for just 13% of the total farm land acreage.

Source: A Digest of West Indian Agricultural Statistics, University of the West Indies, (1965).

<sup>6/</sup> Lloyd Braithwaite, "Social and Political Aspects of Rural Development in the West Indies" in Social and Economic Studies, University of the West Indies, Vol. 17, No. 3, p. 272.

<sup>7/</sup> Dependency ratio denotes the number of persons under 15 and over 65 years of age to every 100 persons in the 15-64 age group.

Another effect of migration is what is called the 'female bias' in the total population, especially in the case of the smaller territories. As stated in a recent report on one of the smaller islands, "whilst one may not entirely agree with the view that absence of the male parent has inevitable damaging consequences, there can be little doubt that ... where there are few traditional functional alternatives to male parental authority, the absence of the father does have certain unhappy social and psychological consequences". <sup>8/</sup>

A socio-cultural parameter which is of great relevance to the development process in the Caribbean is the value-orientation of the population, consequent on exposure to "Western" influence over a long period. No doubt, this has had a beneficial effect in that it has created among the West Indian people a general receptivity to innovations and new ideas, which is not a common feature among the rural populations of many developing countries. The adverse effect i.e., a tendency to accept and adopt too readily value systems, expectations, and consumer patterns of the affluent West without regard to their suitability to the Caribbean conditions and environment, is more pronounced.

Modernization is more often taken to be synonymous with 'westernization'. It is not by accident that there is a good deal of inertia bordering on unconcern, with regard to the question of technological innovations suited to the labour-surplus economies in the region. Mainly owing to the pervasive influence of imitative and dependent 'modernization', the observation has been made that "in the Caribbean, in both the public and private sectors, there is little interest in such matters (pursuing the issue of intermediate technology), and even nationally controlled manufacturing

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<sup>8/</sup> Report on St. Vincent, The Institute of Social and Economic Research, The University of the West Indies, (1969), p. 106.

industries receive their technologies from big multinational corporations under licensing agreements".<sup>9/</sup>

Attributable to the same cause is the failure to utilise fully even the relatively narrow natural resources base of the region. <sup>10/</sup> Food resources from the sea and locally available resources for fabricating building materials are cases in point.

#### DISCORDS TO DEVELOPMENT

It would be useful to identify the various factors hampering and inhibiting development in the Caribbean under three broad categories i.e., physical, institutional and attitudinal.

#### Physical Constraints

The most important physical constraint is the smallness of size of all the Caribbean territories, except Guyana, which is again 'small' in terms of population. Apart from the most evident consequence of small size i.e. a narrow base and range of natural resources, there are other disadvantages as well. For instance, the frequent contact with the town has the result of making the rural people, both as individuals and as communities, follow the consumption level and pattern of the better-off townsmen. In

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<sup>9/</sup> William G. Demas, "Is the Present Approach to Economic Development Planning Relevant to the Solution of the Human Resources Problems of the Commonwealth Caribbean". Paper presented to the Seminar on Human Resources organized by the University of the West Indies in August 1970 (mimeo).

<sup>10/</sup> The dominant position of multi-national corporations also has a role in this. For a fuller discussion, see William G. Demas, "The Political Economy of the English-speaking Caribbean - A Summary View", paper presented to the Conference of Caribbean Churches on Development in November 1971.



this situation, "the mobilization of small rural savings ... becomes a matter of considerable difficulty".<sup>11/</sup>

Another 'social cost' of size also deserves mention. Inherent in a process of planned change is the realization of a set of "modernization ideals", which imply rationality in decisions on action, impartiality, willingness to 'take a long view' etc.<sup>12/</sup> In the more or less "face to face" situation obtaining in small territories, where personal contacts and informal links tend to have an undue measure of influence, these ideals are harder to realize.

There are also special problems of public administration which, though common to most developing countries, size renders more acute. Uncertainty of retention of highly qualified personnel in the public service, non-availability of competent and committed middle-level staff, personal influences in the field of personnel administration, administrative leadership and decision-making, are some of the special problems of small states.<sup>13/</sup>

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<sup>11/</sup> William G. Demas, The Economics of Development in Small Countries with Special Reference to the Caribbean. op. cit.

<sup>12/</sup> See Gunnar Myrdal, Asian Drama, Pantheon, New York, (1968), Vol. 1, pp. 54-63.

<sup>13/</sup> See The Administrative Problems of Small States; Report of a Preliminary Survey, (mimeo), Public Administration Division, United Nations, New York, (1968).

### Institutional Impediments

The importance of building up development-aiding institutions is well recognized, for "economic under-development is itself largely a consequence of institutional under-development".<sup>14/</sup> In the Caribbean, there is need not only to build up an institutional structure for development especially at the local level, but also to correct inhibitory institutions like exploitative land tenure patterns, mass media whose orientation runs counter to the development needs of the region, and an ill-suited educational system.

Owing mostly to historical reasons, both the political and the administrative systems are highly centralized in the Caribbean. As noted by a recent regional seminar, "in the process of political development, national politics in the Caribbean region had become centralized in character. Decisions on party leadership by a small central elite and reluctance on the part of dominant parties to accept or work with opposition groups had engendered political apathy at the local level, broken only at times of national elections".<sup>15/</sup> This, together with centralization of the administrative structure, has impeded the growth of representative local institutions for development. In consideration of this, the Caribbean Regional Workshop on Integrated Rural Development (1969) identified "decentralization of political and administrative structures to enable concrete participation of the rural communities in decision-making processes affecting local and national development" as a specific 'sub-objective' of integrated rural development.<sup>16/</sup>

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<sup>14/</sup> See, Ervin J. Long, "Institutional Factors Limiting Progress in the Less Developed Countries, in Agricultural Science for the Developing Nations", ed. Albert H. Moseman, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington D.C., (1964).

<sup>15/</sup> See Report of the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Central Services to Local Authorities, E/CN.12/881, (1971), p. 13.

<sup>16/</sup> See Report of the Workshop, op. cit., p. 6.

Certain sociological factors also still hinder institution-building in the region. For example, the old institution of slavery has had profound influence on the propensity of people to participate in public affairs. The special type of rural organization (which does not have all the traits of typical ruralism and which bears, both in the scale and method of operation, some marks of industrialism) produced by the plantation system, and the resultant vagueness of identity of the rural people with their localities has had its own impact on the evolution of strong local organizations conducive to development.

An institution which in effect negates an "internally propelled" development in the region is the mass media, especially the television. Various mass media can be effectively used to bring about a re-orientation of the values and ideas of the people, geared to the economic and social realities of the region. Such a revaluation is particularly needed in the sphere of local consumer pattern which is based on that of high income countries without reference to local development needs and priorities. In this connection, the rapidly increasing family ownership of television sets calls for special comment. <sup>17/</sup> Most of the programmes are foreign produced, and the powerful effects of television as an advertising medium are well known. Given the present programmes and advertisement content, they can only result in a reinforcement of the orientation of the local population to the consumer and behaviour patterns of the more affluent societies.

Another factor which deserves close scrutiny is the educational system. Though the quantitative coverage of the school system presents an encouraging picture, its qualitative aspects are yet to be oriented to the actual development needs of the territories.

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<sup>17/</sup> In 1969, there were 41 television sets per thousand persons in Trinidad and Tobago, and in 1968, 29 sets per thousand persons in Jamaica.  
Source: United Nations Statistical Yearbook, (1970).

Elementary school education is geared primarily to academic preparation for the grammar school, and there are inadequate vocational and technical training arrangements. Consequently, a large number of 'dropouts' from education during the primary stage, enter the working force bereft of skills and very often unequipped with an attitudinal base conducive to acquisition of requisite skills. The observation made in the Pearson Commission Report<sup>18/</sup> that "in too many instances, children who finish primary school in rural areas seem to be less fit to become creative and constructive members of their own community than if they had never been to school", has some applicability to the Caribbean. However, it must be borne in mind that the need for change in the orientation of the educational system should be recognized not only by educational planners, administrators and political leaders, but by the beneficiaries of the service as well.

#### Attitudinal Restraints

In any development situation, attitudes are usually the most decisive factor. It is, therefore, necessary to examine certain attitudes, shaped both by history and the present exposure to North American ways of life, which blur perception of the real development needs and demands of the region.

Paradoxical as it might seem, the comparative affluence among the developing countries, and in particular of the West Indian population, <sup>19/</sup>itself acts as a development restraint. This feeling of prosperity, together with the orientation to the consumer taste prevalent in the affluent West, has led to

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<sup>18/</sup> Partners in Development: Report of the Commission on International Development, Praeger publishers, New York, (1969), p. 67.

<sup>19/</sup> In 1970, the per capita GDP for the region as a whole was estimated at US\$572. The figures for the individual countries ranged between US\$259 and US\$787.

considerable imitative conspicuous consumption which is fairly widespread among the different income groups. Other contributory factors are the relative ease of import of consumer goods, and the lending pattern <sup>20/</sup> of the branches of large international banks which dominate the banking system.

This phenomenon tends to decrease the population's propensity to save, and also results in a maldistribution of con-sumption expenditure, especially among the lower income strata, who in many cases forego expenditure on essential items in preference for luxury goods. Again, with a pattern of consumer demand heavily conditioned by that in the affluent countries, the efforts of Caribbean Governments to implement import-substitution policies will be frustrated by the diversion of investment funds from sectors with high development potential to those with low or even negative development potential. Prolonged continuation of this attitudinal discord may lead to a situation which could be called 'prosperity at the expense of posterity'.

Another unfavourable feature concerning attitudes is a vague sense of lack of confidence prevalent among many sections of the population in different occupational strata. As a result of colonial heritage, the tendency still lingers to look 'outward' for assistance, especially advisory services, even when adequate expertise is available within the region. Undue concern over what the foreign investors and tourists "will think of us" is another factor to be noted. <sup>21/</sup>

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<sup>20/</sup> A scrutiny of the percentage distribution of instalment credit according to different categories of uses shows that on an average, about 40% of the loans is for purchase of motor vehicles, and about 30% for furniture, furnishings and home improvement. Source: Statistical Digest, Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, October 1971.

<sup>21/</sup> In one of the territories, the construction of a correctional institution for delinquent boys was sought to be justified on the basis that "the potential damage (by such boys) to our image and our tourism industry cannot be over emphasized".



SOME WEAKNESSES IN THE SPHERE OF PLANNING FOR DEVELOPMENT

As in most developing countries, planning as a continuous process of 'organized, rational, and directed decision-making' has been accepted by all area governments. Preparation of development plans is an activity faithfully pursued, and planning units have been established in almost all territories. There are, however, quite a few drawbacks both with regard to plan formulation and plan implementation which will be briefly outlined in this section.

The very conception of development which equated "growth" with development, is now open to serious question. Moreover, despite the pressing unemployment problem, no separate employment strategy was incorporated in the development plans, and employment was considered as a by-product of general economic growth. Even the employment targets set did not adequately reflect the seriousness of the unemployment problem. The targets, even if fulfilled, would only check further worsening of the employment position. Professor Myrdal's criticism in some other connection that "in no other respect is preservation of the status quo an almost declared objective of planning" <sup>22/</sup> has some applicability to the Caribbean situation.

Although medium-term plans, usually for a five-year span, are prepared, there have been generally no long-term policies and perspectives to serve as a framework for the medium-term plan. Further, there has not been adequate correlation between the 'aggregative' medium-term plans and annual budgets.

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<sup>22/</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, op. cit., p. 963.

In the absence of authentic, integrated long-term development policies incorporating the image of the future society that we are now striving to build, plans would tend to become a mere expression of aspirations and a catalogue of desiderata. Crudely put, such plans would only serve to fulfil the formal requirements insisted on by agencies offering aid for projects. <sup>23/</sup> Dr. Prebisch's observation on Latin American countries that "those responsible for planning did not take care to ensure that a specific and explicit strategy to guide development policy was formulated at the appropriate time" <sup>24/</sup> applies to the Caribbean as well.

Lack of specification of policy has been more pronounced in the 'social' field than in the 'economic' sectors of development plans. In many cases, social development seems to have been regarded simply as providing some additional outlay to the areas of public social actions like education, housing and social welfare. The interrelationship among the social sectors of development are yet to be fully reflected in development plans.

Although the need for harmonization of planning in 'economic' and 'non-economic' fields is generally recognised, strategies in economic planning still place almost exclusive emphasis on economic indicators like markets and prices, savings, investment and output.

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<sup>23/</sup> For a fuller discussion on this subject, see Marshall Wolfe, "Between the Idea and the Reality: Notes on Plan Implementation" in International Social Development Review, op. cit.

<sup>24/</sup> Raul Prebisch, Change and Development: Latin America's Great Task, Report submitted to the Inter-American Development Bank, (1970), p. 201.



It is not fully appreciated that in a developing situation, social factors do not readily and smoothly adjust themselves to changes in economic development, but may well inhibit and obstruct them. Further, it must be borne in mind that measures for restructuring the economy not only create in their wake new sets of social problems but also change the form and characteristics of existing ones.

Unfortunately, there has been no conscious attempt to take into account the causal interrelationship between sets of economic factors like output and incomes, prevailing technology and levels of living, and sets of non-economic factors like attitudes and institutions. Many economic models on which plans are based, isolate certain of these variables, mostly the economic ones, without regard to their inseparability from the other variables - a process which Professor Myrdal terms 'illegitimate isolation'. <sup>25/</sup> Such an isolationist strategy results mainly from a transplantation of West European or North American economic models, without a thorough appraisal of their applicability to the developing situation.

To some extent, technical assistance from external agencies has also been, if unintentionally, responsible for the sectoral isolation found in the development plans in the region. Advice on development policy has been tendered by various experts obtained from different specialized international agencies or through bilateral assistance, and each one of them naturally seeks to promote "his" sector. There have also been examples of particular donor-agencies concerned with a specific sector successfully persuading governments into accepting some project-aid not quite consistent with an integrated development policy. As had been stated in that section of the 1970 Report on the World Social Situation relating to the

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<sup>25/</sup> See Gunnar Myrdal Asian Drama, op. cit., pp. 1843-1941.

Commonwealth Caribbean, "experts representing the interests of different agencies, in seeking to promote their programmes, too often tend to isolate other sectors from their own operations".<sup>26/</sup>

The perpetuation of the orthodox capital investment theory of development, which fails to take into account that development involves a process of institutional change, is also due to the fact that in most of the Caribbean territories development planning is undertaken primarily by economists and statisticians trained under 'model-builders' of developed countries. They do not always have sufficient experience with, or insight into, the social and institutional aspects of comprehensive planning. In rare cases where sociologists are involved in the planning process, their function seems to be limited to identifying "social obstacles" which may hinder the implementation of a predetermined plan.

With regard to plan implementation, lack of qualified personnel, and structural, procedural and attitudinal defects in the government administrative machinery, have been the main inhibitors. Apart from other common hurdles like difficulties in adapting a foreign-designed machinery to the emerging needs of the developing countries, and unsatisfactory working conditions, the most serious obstacle encountered in the public administration field in the Caribbean has been the uncertainty of retaining highly qualified personnel in the public service. This may be attributed not only to unattractive salaries and limited promotion prospects, but also - and more importantly - to the comparable limitation of scope and scale of operations, which do not offer adequate professional challenge or satisfaction.<sup>27/</sup>

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<sup>26/</sup> 1970 Report on the World Social Situation, E/CN.5/456/Add.2, p. 65.

<sup>27/</sup> See Report of the Tripartite Economic Survey of the Eastern Caribbean, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, (1967).

Another difficulty which besets planning in general is the lack of adequate, reliable and up-to-date data upon which to base decisions and projections. The serious consequences of formulating plans based more on hope than on knowledge is not always fully recognized. Furthermore, non-availability of junior staff to collect and collate information systematically frustrates the efforts of senior planning officials to build up a regular process of data collection.

The lack of desired level and extent of popular participation is another factor responsible for failures in plan implementation. Although development is a political objective, the approach to it in the Caribbean has been essentially administrative. This stands in the way of effective popular participation even at the stage of execution. When planners and 'development practitioners' refer to 'participation' they often interpret it only as 'mobilization' of unutilized human resources to offer self-help for the execution of local projects. In other words, 'participation' has generally been thought of more from the point of view of the 'mobiliser' than from that of the 'participator'. Further, even though community development with its stress on popular participation has been accepted as a development strategy by all the governments, participation is yet to be conceived as the "responsiveness of the society to the requirements of the deprived and marginal strata that are caught in the web of structural poverty", <sup>28/</sup>

Poor plan performance is also due to the insufficient insight of the experts assigned under various technical co-operation programmes into the real problems and needs of the Caribbean. This is especially so with regard to projects in the 'social' fields. One of the common mistakes made is to over-generalize about the region's problems and solutions. The in-applicability of strategies and approaches successfully tried out in another

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<sup>28/</sup> See Report of the Caribbean Regional Workshop on Integrated Rural Development, (1969), op. cit., p. 134.

developing situation with which the foreign expert might have been associated, is not always adequately appreciated. The fact that many of the advisers on social policy have been trained in the techniques of public social action in the industrialised developed countries is also a factor to be noted. <sup>29/</sup>

On the question of evaluation, insufficient attention is paid to the extent to which the traditional quantitative indicators of progress correctly measure the attainment of real development objectives. The fact that a certain potential is on the increase does not guarantee an optimum utilization of that potential. Especially with regard to social services, the provision of which is quantitatively on the increase, the distributional aspects require critical attention; for theoretical equality of access to these services does not necessarily lead to equality of participation. Evaluation of plan implementation should also include assessment of the adequacy of the indicators and targets. <sup>30/</sup>

This should be borne in mind not only by governments evaluating their own projects, but also by the international agencies who set their own indices of success in implementation of the schemes they assist.

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<sup>29/</sup> See Social Change and Social Development Policy in Latin America, United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.70.11.G.3.

<sup>30/</sup> See Marshall Wolfe, op. cit. See also Report of the Caribbean Regional Workshop on Integrated Rural Development, op. cit., which makes the observation that evaluation of results both by the governments and donor agencies has been "generally more descriptive than analytical, and too often tended to become tendentious justifications of particular operations" (p. 85). For a discussion on the inappropriateness and even inequity of the criteria of 'good performance' set by donor agencies see Teresa Hayter, Aid as Imperialism, Pelican Books, (1971).

In enumerating the problems of development in the Caribbean, the intention in this paper is not to read "each weakness clear" and say "thou ailest here and here". Problems and drawbacks have been highlighted with a view to assisting the formulation of an appropriate strategy which will fully realize the potential and fulfil the aspirations of the Caribbean. New voices are now increasingly being heard from learned and mature circles, including the Church, urging more localization of decision-making, reorientation of values and institutions, and a more authentic and meaningful popular participation in development. With this new awareness at all levels, one can envisage a fresh purposive direction for planning in the region, and the emergence of a new climate and discipline for development.

