

Meeting of Caribbean Planners Network
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REPORT OF MEETING OF CARIBBEAN PLANNERS NETWORK

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1.0 Introduction

Dr. Len Ishmael, Director of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, welcomed 20 participants from 11 countries to the meeting. She highlighted some of the Office's activities in the field of planning, including assisting regional governments in the conduct of audits of planning departments, legislative review and reform of planning administration systems. In addition, ECLAC undertook research into the impacts of tourism on the land market in three islands and a comparative study of policies governing transfer of land to foreigners in non-Caribbean small island States.

For the benefit of those who were not present at earlier Caribbean Planners Network (CPN) meetings, Dr. Ishmael outlined the sequence of events that culminated in the establishment of the CPN. At a meeting of planners held in December 1999 concerns were expressed about:

- The marginalisation of planning and its alienation from the development process;
- Low morale among planners working in the public service;
- The lack of confidence in and support for planning from politicians and the general public.

Participants at that meeting also expressed the desire for a regional forum within which they could interact, exchange ideas, stay 'connected' and support each other. The meeting also discussed the possibility of achieving this by establishing a Caribbean Planners Network, operating through the medium of a website and an electronic newsletter. An advisory committee was selected from among participants at this meeting to reflect geographical spread, representation from public and private sector planners and legal and academic inputs. With technical, financial and logistical support provided by ECLAC, the website was launched in October 2000 on World Habitat Day.

Dr. Ishmael reiterated that the CPN was not intended to duplicate, replace or compete with any existing local or regional planning institutions, nor to represent or be represented by any government or national planning associations. Instead, the CPN was a network comprising individual planners, which sought to provide support to planners.

Following the Director's opening remarks, delegates were invited to introduce themselves. Participants also provided brief highlights of current issues and the status of physical planning in their country.

2.0 Country news

Anguilla

- The concept of physical planning is new to Anguilla and there is some resistance to efforts to regulate development of private land.
- Legislation prepared under the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) project was revised and is to be submitted to the Executive Council.
- The National Physical Development Plan is under review and is yet to be approved.

Barbados

- Barbados has a fairly long and relatively successful history of physical planning.
- A Physical Development Plan is to be presented to Cabinet within the next two months.
- A shortage of planners is placing a tremendous burden on the available staff.

Belize

- Physical/land use planning is receiving more attention within recent years due to the damage caused by tropical storms to coastal settlements.
- Planning functions have now been placed within one ministry (Natural Resources).
- Attempts are being made to put together an association of professional planners with assistance from the Trinidad and Tobago Society of Planners.
- The Satellite City Project was initiated within the context of a decentralisation policy to encourage resettlement away from the coast (the satellite city project) but, to date, this has had limited success due to the reluctance of the population to relocate.

British Virgin Islands

- The first Integrated Development Plan has been prepared with the assistance of the UNCHS and other consultants.
- A system in which proposed development activity is channelled through the planning process and which also allows for public comment and input has been designed. The system has worked fairly successfully and is now being attempted within the Economic Planning Unit.

Dominica

- In Dominica and within the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), generally, planning has not received much attention and this is only now beginning to change.
- Dominica has received some assistance from the OECS Secretariat in physical planning and, with the additional inputs from UNCHS and ECLAC, the situation in the country is improving. Ten years after preparation began a physical development plan is now being taken to Parliament.
- It is hoped that there will be something of a quantum leap forward in the perception and use of physical planning in the future.

Grenada

- Like Dominica, the practice of physical planning is not yet entrenched.
- After considering the planning systems in Barbados and Saint Lucia, Grenada is developing a planning system based on the Saint Lucian model.
- The Grenada Development Plan will be presented to Cabinet on 28 January 2002.

Jamaica

- Jamaica is very much concerned with land reform and associated policies.
- There has been an alienation of planners from the decision-making process and, consequently, the development approvals process is still very political.
- A new Developers' Manual was prepared. A participatory model of planning is also documented. Both documents can be made available via the CPN.

Montserrat

- Prior to the volcanic eruptions in Montserrat, planning was a very haphazard process. However, since resettlement has begun there is a more organized planning system in place and the tragedy of the volcano has allowed Montserrat to review its approach and correct or avoid past mistakes.
- The Physical Development Plan and Environmental Regulations have been approved.

Saint Lucia

- New physical planning legislation was prepared and an audit of the physical planning system conducted with assistance from ECLAC. The legislation was approved by Parliament in December 2001 and includes provisions for public participation and Environmental Impact Assessments.
- The Act replaces the Development Control Authority with a Planning Department under a Minister.

Trinidad and Tobago

- There is now a parallel planning system operating in the country with responsibility for Town and Country Planning exercised by both the Town and Country Planning Division and the Interim National Physical Planning Commission.
- A Planning and Development of Land Bill was brought to Parliament under the last administration but this lapsed with the dissolution of Parliament in advance of the December 2001 general election.
- The Town and Country Planning Division is woefully understaffed. There are 26 posts on the establishment but current employment consists of only two local planners and four contract officers from the United Kingdom.

3.0 Presentation of the revised website

Dr. Deborah Thomas, Consultant, made a presentation of the revised CPN website and highlighted its major features. It was noted that since its launch in October 2000, the CPN website received approximately 180 visitors, not many of whom went beyond the home page.

The most frequently used feature of the site was the Legal Digest. The Bulletin Board attracted relatively few contributions on a limited number of topics. It had been felt previously that there was need to improve the attractiveness and functionality of the site and to increase awareness of its existence among regional planners and related professionals. Substantial support for the redesign of the website was provided by colleagues at ECLAC Headquarters in Santiago.

The revised site includes the following pages:

- **Home Page** (About the CPN: Welcome to the Caribbean Planners Network)
 - Who We Are
 - Mission
 - Contact Us
- **Directory:** Contacts and links to planning agencies, professionals, associations and other related institutions in the Caribbean.
 - Professional Planners
 - Planning Offices
 - Regional Agencies
- **News Forum:** Planning news from across the Caribbean
 - Managing Development
 - Eye on the Environment
 - Tech Talk
 - Education and Training
 - Communities in Action
 - Legal Briefs
 - Mailbag
- **Membership:** Includes a member registration form.
- **Feature topic:** In-depth, but non-academic, analysis of critical issues of regional importance. Identify problems, opportunities and constraints. Explore policy, legal and institutional interventions needed and propose solutions to create desired change
 - Urbanisation in the Caribbean
- **Country focus:** Learn more about the planning system and issues challenging planners in countries across the Caribbean. A different country may be featured each quarter.
 - Fact File
 - Planning News Brief
 - Development Issues
 - Planners in Practice
 - Directory of professionals and agencies
- **Publications:** Access documents produced by planners and planning agencies/departments in the region.
- **Events:** Meetings, seminars and other events of interest.

- **Best practices:** Examples of successful planning and development or environmental initiatives that can serve as a model for others to learn from and emulate.
- **Electronic conference:** Use this forum to speak to colleagues. Find out how they have dealt with similar issues, request documents and information, share tips and experiences and participate in on-line discussions on selected topics.
- **Legal digest:** Share and learn lessons of experience in the enforcement of planning and land law through this digest of planning and related cases adjudicated in the region's courts. Read the facts of the case and the decisions handed down by the courts.
 - Cases A to M
 - Cases N to Z
- **Professional opportunities:** Identify job vacancies at planning agencies/departments and private firms in the region, and opportunities for scholarships and fellowships. Also, search the vacancy lists of regional agencies.
- **Architecture and urban design:** Take a visual trip across the Caribbean to see buildings of architectural interest and public spaces that work or need work!
- **Archives:** Read previously published articles from the website and reports/minutes from initial meetings of the CPN steering committee.

Participants were advised that the new format for the website provides many opportunities for planners in the region to contribute information for development and continued maintenance of the website. Information may be supplied in the form of photos, news bites, news/photo stories in addition to feature length articles and academic publications (see Appendix 1 – Information Request Summary). This is expected to be less onerous on potential contributors who are already stretched to the limits in their jobs. Further assistance will be provided by the webmaster who, with the librarian, is responsible for uploading documents onto the website, editing contributions, monitoring the bulletin board and directing technical queries to the advisory committee.

3.1 Comments

The following comments were made:

1. Ms. Jacqueline DaCosta expressed the view that the mission statement should reflect that the CPN was not only for professional planners and 'related professionals'. She also felt the mission statement should clarify whether the term 'planning' refers to 'physical', 'landuse', 'integrated' or 'comprehensive' planning. Following discussion, it was agreed that the primary focus will be towards land use planners and the phrase “linking primarily land use planners” will be inserted. It was noted that the mission statement shown was a draft and that the suggestions would be taken under advisement, a new mission statement drafted and circulated for comment. She observed that since there were relatively few planners in the Caribbean it was necessary to attract a larger audience.

Under the proposed format for the 'Country Focus' feature, Ms. DaCosta felt that too much time would elapse before all countries in the region were featured. Mr. Ivor Jackson suggested, and the meeting agreed, to add a 'Country Profile' page with general information about each country in a standardised format. This would be accessible to all visitors to the site, regardless of which country was currently in focus.

2. Mr. Cecil Fredericks was concerned about the long-term sustainability of the site and Mr. Louis Potter inquired as to the duration of the funding and support from ECLAC. Dr. Ishmael assured participants that ECLAC's commitment to the CPN would continue, provided the CPN continued to grow and receive the interest and support of the region's planners. The CPN is now included in ECLAC's budget and a research officer who is soon to be recruited to work with the Director will be assigned certain responsibilities for the CPN and will function as the webmaster. Sufficient advance notice would be given to members before ECLAC's involvement is terminated so that alternative arrangements can be made for administration of the site.
3. Mr. Allan Jones suggested the creation of a link to global initiatives affecting the Caribbean, including positions/responses of regional governments to the issues raised by such initiatives. This page should also include links to recent speeches, preparatory documents for regional and international conferences, etc. Dr. Ishmael noted that some similar information on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) issues was already available on the ECLAC website.
4. Dr. James Armstrong identified the need for a more substantive input from regional academic institutions such as the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the University of Technology in Jamaica, especially in the form of student and departmental research. The need to identify a mechanism for capturing this information was emphasized.
5. Ms. DaCosta suggested that the website should include provision for addressing the following issues:
 - Spatial data management/GIS
 - Policy development and policy statements
 - Planning legislation and regulations
 - Participatory planning initiatives
 - Development standards
 - Online training for continuing professional development (CPD)
6. Ms. Christine Allahar made a plea for unreported planning related cases to be submitted for the Legal Digest.
7. Mr. Mark Cummins noted that the legal digest was a critical feature of the site as some societies, like Barbados, were becoming more litigious. Mr. Cummins also noted that contributions to the website might be fewer as more planners work in development control and devote less time to policy formulation and research.

8. Ms. Allahar suggested that efforts should be made to access copies of documents from the concluded HABITAT projects in the OECS member countries (e.g. model physical planning legislation and planning and infrastructure standards) and make them available on the website. She also suggested that countries should provide information on changes made to customise these documents and the rationale for these. Ms Allahar noted that copyright laws must be observed and necessary permissions obtained before documents were posted on the website.
9. Ms. DaCosta expressed concern that many planners might not have access to the internet.

4.0 CPN membership policy

Much discussion was generated by issues raised by Mr. Jackson concerning who were the members of the CPN and the distinction between contributors to and users of the CPN website. Questions were also raised about the benefits/privileges of membership, whether there should be restricted access to users of the site who were not members, and the use of alternative terminology such as 'participants'.

Mr. Ken Snaggs suggested that discussions on membership should address the following:

- How exclusive is the site?
- Is membership restricted to Caribbean planners only?
- Restricted access to parts of the site
- Formulation of a privacy policy to protect sensitive information

Dr. Ishmael explained that the use of the site envisaged concentric rings of members, the first circle being professional planners, followed by planning students, related professionals and general visitors. While Dr. Ishmael expressed the view that a clear distinction should be made between membership of the CPN and use of its website, Ms. Allahar noted that the two were one and the same since the CPN functioned through the medium of the website. Dr. Ishmael further noted that a primary objective of the CPN was to put a Caribbean stamp on the theory and practice of planning

Dr. Thomas suggested that since the website provided a forum for planners to interact and exchange ideas, the membership form on the website should be renamed a 'registration form' and the concept of members replaced by 'network participants'.

Given the importance of membership in creating a sense of belonging and responsibility and engendering commitment, Mr. Snaggs felt this issue should be discussed in further detail. It was agreed that the Advisory Committee should meet to review the membership policy to addresses the issues raised.

It was also agreed that rather than restricting access to the site, the issue of ensuring confidentiality of certain documents should be addressed by providing a summary/abstract of sensitive documents with appropriate contact information provided for persons wishing to obtain further details.

5.0 Administration and maintenance of the website

As an ECLAC initiative, ECLAC will continue to provide support for development of the CPN website. The meeting was advised that the CPN now had its own domain name, www.caribbeanplannersnetwork.org, and the site could be migrated to this domain at any time while maintaining a direct link from ECLAC's homepage. Dr. Ishmael's research officer will continue to function as the webmaster with responsibility for monitoring the site, uploading information provided, editing contributions and coordinating responses to technical queries made via the bulletin board or mailbag.

Mr. Jackson expressed the view that if the webmaster at ECLAC was indispensable for the proper working of the site, then maybe the site had been wrongly designed. While recognising the importance of ensuring the sustainability of the website in the absence of support from ECLAC, the issue did not arise at this time. Instead, Dr. Ishmael emphasised that the sustainability and success of the website would be more secure if members, as individuals, saw it as an obligation to contribute to the CPN. For the network to be sustainable, it must be membership supported. Indeed, the older Caribbean planners had a responsibility and a moral obligation to leave a legacy for younger professionals.

There were suggestions from Ms. Carole Smart and Mr. Raphael Francis that support should be sought from governments and regional institutions, such as CARICOM, for the CPN and that contributions from public sector planning agencies should be encouraged. However, it was agreed that the CPN was intended to be non-political and there should be a clear demonstration that the network was fully supported by the membership itself. Dr. Ishmael urged participants to be honest with respect to what they were able to deliver in terms of time and commitment to the network.

6.0 CPN country focal points

The meeting agreed on the need to identify country focal points with whom the administrators of the CPN could liaise to obtain information about or disseminate information within a certain country. The following participants agreed to serve as focal points for their countries:

COUNTRY	FOCAL POINT
Anguilla	Sharon Roberts-Hodge
Antigua	Ivor Jackson
Barbados	To be determined
Belize	Carolyn Trench-Sandiford
BVI	Louis Potter
Grenada	Cecil Fredericks
Jamaica	Jackie DaCosta
Montserrat	Franklyn Greenaway
St. Lucia	Daune Heholt and Blaize Nickson
St. Vincent	Bentley Browne

7.0 Increasing public awareness of the CPN

As a first step, the focal points will be responsible for disseminating information and making the CPN known to fellow professionals and interested colleagues. Mr. Cummins agreed to provide information to the Government Information Service in Barbados for dissemination to a wider audience. In addition, a link to the CPN is to be provided to major search engines. Other cost effective means might also be contemplated.

In preparation for the launch of the revised website, a press release will be prepared and regional coverage sought via CaribScope or the Caribbean News Agency (CANA). It was agreed that the press release will first be circulated among participants for comment.

The revised website will be relaunched in early March. This requires input from all participants. A detailed request for information will be finalised and distributed among participants.

8.0 Any other business

The meeting agreed that the Advisory Committee would prepare and circulate the following:

- A policy on archiving;
- Criteria for identifying Best Practice initiatives and suitable categories;
- An outline structure for preparation of country profiles;
- A detailed membership policy.

9.0 Closing remarks

Comments and commitments related to the CPN were as follows:

- Mr. Potter noted that the network had great potential. He promised to provide photographs as well as articles.
- Ms. Smart committed herself to assisting with the preparation of a country profile for Trinidad and Tobago and providing access to digital photographs.
- Ms Carolyn Trench-Sandiford remarked that the network should be looked at as an individual challenge, in terms of both commitment and obligation.
- Mr. Snaggs noted that the network would take a tremendous amount of management and leadership. He felt that unless people were pushed, they would not respond. He saw this as the probable role of the focal point. He insisted that the leadership must reach out and get people to respond.
- Mr. Cummins indicated that the Natural Resource Management Centre at the Cave Hill campus of UWI contained a variety of useful material and would be willing to share their time and knowledge. He also agreed to contribute photographs and articles.

- Mr. Daune Heholt saw the CPN as providing a forum for exchange especially where ground-breaking events were taking place in planning in certain islands.

Dr. Ishmael then thanked everyone for their participation and contributions and expressed the desire that the effort being made would benefit young planners, and the Caribbean as a whole, in the future.

The meeting concluded at 4:40p.m.

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