

Breaking the Dependency Syndrome

The transformation of the world in which we live and work, is but a nightmare to most, considering the changes that have been imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The essence of what is being experiencing is ably captured in the lyrics of the calypso entitled, 'These are the signs of the times', sung by the Barbadian calypsonian, Red Plastic Bag. He reminded that "Signs are everywhere, don't you get mix up, don't you get tie up, all of the signs are there." The world which was reeling from economic recession, saw a down turn in business and where massive loss of jobs was a direct consequence.

COVID-19 placed the world on pause, as the global lock down was enforced. It was virtually unthinkable that this would have happen in the 21st Century. No one would have predicted that outside of the start of a World War that air and sea travel in relation to commercial activity would have come to a halt. It would be inconceivable to think that industrialized countries which controlled the world commerce, would have resorted to the hoarding of supplies and impose restrictions on trading activities. Yes, these were the signs of the times.

It is left to wonder what lessons if any, have been learnt by small island states and what the likely responses will be. The high dependence on tourism and on imports has been exposed. The tourism industry is a known source of high employment. It does not stand alone for it galvanizes activities in many aspects of the service sector, including related tourism services. These are, transportation, recreational, hospitality, entertainment, entrepreneurship and retail business activity. This all translated in job creation and to the economic development of countries everywhere. This description of what exists underlines the dependency syndrome or reliance on foreign markets to patronize individual small island states and a cluster such the Caribbean region.

There are two variables that are important to the success of the tourism sector, which are linked to its sustainability. These variables are investment and job creation and the maintaining of employment. Starting with the notion of investment, it would seem that the Caribbean as a region which depends heavily on tourism, the thinking and emphasis would be to consolidate the regional position. This can be done by having an investment in a regional carrier or to partner in a significant way with a major airline, to ensure that it can have some control over airlift into the region from international destinations. It cannot be enough to simply negotiate with a carrier for airlift on a seasonal basis, without being

conscious that a premature end to the arrangement lends to the vulnerability of the region, when it comes to the movement of tourist traffic.

The clear example of this shortcoming, is evident in the non-ownership of an international carrier, which was likely to make a difference in the COVID-19 expatriation of locals to their homelands. Instead, there had to be the reliance on international carriers to transport nationals' home from international destination. Coming out of this, the point to be underscored is that countries which place a focus on the marketing of their tourism destination, ought to recognize this is only designed to meet a specific goal or expectation of acquiring a requisite number of tourists' arrivals. Investment in an international regional carrier and the securing of air routes can make a big difference to the security of the tourism product.

When it comes to the hotel plants, it must be obvious to most that these are controlled by foreign investors, who also as large corporate entities are investment partners in the airlines and other sectors of the tourism industries. It would be a boss move, if local share ownership is offered in the constructing of hotel plants; that is based on workers' share ownership, and offer of share ownership to all categories of Barbadian nationals. There is no reason why a large share ownership programme could not be developed as it relates to creation of a regional international carrier that is buttress by the subsidies provided by regional governments.

Paying more attention to investment in agriculture and manufacturing must become part of the action plan going forward. The development of an agro industry sector can no longer be ignored. Opportunities must be provided for the many young intellectuals graduating from universities across the region, to be engaging in critical areas such as medical research and developing ITC Services for the global market.

There is the call now, more than ever, to think outside of the box. If the Caribbean region is to grow and develop, then new investment opportunities must be created and fashioned. Some ideas on the surface may appear offline, but there is nothing to be lost in considering them.

Returning to the lyrics of the Red Plastic Bag in his calypso, entitled, 'These are the signs of the times,' we are reminded: "Free up your mind, these are the signs of the times, you can see where there are pointing, you can see where there are leading, signs and signals of all times, these are the signs of the times."

Breaking the Dependency Syndrome: Dennis de Peiza, Labour & Employee Relations Consultant: Regional Management Services Inc., 3 July 2020