

***NATIONAL LIAISON COMMITTEE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF  
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE BARBADOS NATIONAL  
COMMISSION FOR UNESCO, INAUGURAL SEMINAR ON 'SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN BARBADOS'***

***PRESENTATION ON THE TOPIC OF "SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
POLICY CHALLENGE OF BARBADOS...A NEW  
PERSPECTIVE" DELIVERED BY DENNIS DE PEIZA GENERAL  
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Today, my task is to address the subject of '*Social Development Policy  
Challenge in Barbados...A new Perspective.*'

In laying the foundation for this presentation, I start with identifying with the notion that a social policy concerns itself with human development and sustainability. I consider it as a given that social development policy should be directed at addressing the needs of deprived people in a given society, and to prevent deprivation in the future. Consistent with this, the focus of a national social development policy should be directed at poverty reduction through wealth creation, employment generation, and social integration.

In Barbados the issues of health, poverty, labour, environmental issues, constraints on women, the elderly, youth, children and vulnerable groups, all

emerge as critical areas to be addressed under the social development policy agenda.

Having identified the issues, Government is now challenged to go further, and identify those areas that warrant to be given priority attention, and to determine and implement effective corrective strategies.

To my mind, social integration as it specifically relates to older persons, persons with disabilities, family and youth should be placed on the priority list. Equally so, there is also the need to treat to the more long-standing issue of the growing inequalities that exists between the rich and the poor in our society.

The seriousness of this is reflected in a growing consciousness of the widening and deepening of the inequality that exists in our society, between skilled and unskilled labour.

As I understand it, a social development policy should be directed at promoting social and economic change. It therefore follows that if there is to be any bridging of the gap between the rich and the poor, then government is obligated to concentrate its efforts on a programme that seeks to sustain poverty reduction. This seems to be the logical path to pursue, if the goal of the empowerment of people and providing better life for citizens; particularly those categorized as poor and middle-income wage earners, is to be achieved.

Much is being made of the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, and it would seem that the Barbados Government is committed to a Social Development Policy, at the forefront of which is poverty eradication. If this policy is to achieve its intended goal, then greater emphasis has to be placed on providing a more level playing field; by creating opportunities for wealth creation; thus eliminating the vast majority of the glaring disparities and inequalities that divide the population.

Government therefore has out of a sense of necessity and urgency, to look at improving the education and health status of the poor, addressing the matter of low income housing needs, developing a meaningful land policy, and addressing the social fallout associated with unemployment and underemployment. It is critical that government focuses its attention on job creation, human resources development and the protection of the environment. The bottom line is that Government needs to concentrate on developing a strong social policy that creates a base for sustainable growth.

When it comes to the issue of job creation, there is the need for new initiatives to be introduced. Identifying new job opportunities seems in my judgment, the most appropriate way to fight the war of unemployment and underemployment. Recognizing the increasing number of graduates coming

out the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic and the Barbados Community College, this demands that a proactive approach be taken to finding solutions to the immediate and long term employment problem.

From where I sit in the labour movement, it is our position that there is need for a man power survey to be conducted. This has been long overdue, and as the opportunity presents itself to review our social policy, emphasis ought to be placed on initiating a comprehensive man power survey.

Noting the wave of academic and highly skilled individuals that are graduating out of the educational system, there is clearly the need to provide quality and better paying jobs. It is the only meaningful alternative to counteract the social fallout, where persons are prepared to engage in illegal activities such as the sale of drugs, since it supposedly brings quick and large sums of cash. When we consider that fallouts associated with the drug culture, namely, social deviance, crime and violence, it is of necessity that our social policy focuses on restoring a sense of order, and a removal of sub cultural activities, that place members of the society either under seize or at risk; and more over, places strain on the island's limited resources in providing a range of social services.

Turning attention to the question of a living wage, it is outrageous to expect the working poor to survive in a high priced Barbadian society, on what amounts basically to starvation wages. Realistically, how can those at the bottom, who receive weekly wages of between \$200- 300, be expected to survive, taking into consideration the high cost of house rents, utilities and food? This raises the issue of a minimum wage at the sectorial and enterprise levels, which needs to be hammered out. Admittedly, there are no quick and easy solutions to be found in addressing this.

Out of this emerges the need for greater level of social dialogue that embraces all who have a vested interest. With the establishment of the social partnership in Barbados, the mechanism to facilitate this has already been established.

There is clearly no need to reinvent the wheel, but more so, to provide greater opportunities where civil society and the social partners can consult on social policy issues.

The challenge is ours to follow the approach enunciated by Phil Harding, Senior Social Development Adviser of the DFID, in India. He opined that “Usually work on governance starts with government and trickles down to the people, but social development starts at the opposite direction, hence it is the need to promote complimentary of efforts.”

In any review of the social development policy of Barbados, the subject of education ought to be given priority treatment. It has often been said that education is the key to one's upward mobility, and way out of poverty. In an age of technological changes, propelled by the computer and the internet, the upgrading of people's knowledge, skills and competencies are essential, if they are to be suitably placed to compete for available jobs opportunities.

Is it justifiable to speak glowingly to the fact that the literacy rate in Barbados stands at approximately 90%, that over 50% of Barbadian households have a Secondary education, and over 40% have a primary education, whilst the reality is that the vast majority of our school leavers are not fit for the job market? If the claim is one hundred percent accurate that 70% of secondary school leavers in Barbados, do so without certification, and that some technical skills taught in schools are irrelevant to the labour market, then there is a need to rethink the educational component of our social policy. Greater emphasis must be placed on work place skills that embrace the new technologies.

It can be argued that in the execution of its social policy, that government's public spending is limited by virtue of the financial resources available to it. Taking into consideration the effects of effects of globalization, it would appear that it is further constrained in meeting domestic needs..

Being aware that this is the case, it seems logical that government moves to reduce unproductive spending. The fact that a Social Development Policy is linked to Government's Macro Economic Policy, and considering that built into the macro economic policy is government's reliance on foreign borrowing and funding from international donor agencies: and recognizing that many of these funding agencies are withdrawing or reducing levels of assistance, and more over that fact that Barbados no longer qualifies for donor assistance based on its high ratings as a developing country, it is imperative that government exercises stringency, in order to enable it to deliver on its social programmes.

Changing economic and social factors necessitate that the social development policy concerns itself with the small size of Barbados, its limited natural resources, the fragile tourism industry and the aging population. This brings me to reemphasis the point that Government has to develop innovative ways of employment creation, if it is to remove any added pressure on the social system. Added to this, it would require that new strategies be identified for securing funding to support programme initiatives.

Out of necessity, no effort is to be spared to reduce the incidence of unemployment amongst the able bodied and employable citizens of this

society. This means that people with disabilities ought to be fully integrated into the world of work.

Returning back to the subject of providing quality and sustained employment, it is important that the social policy reflects a commitment to upholding the ILO's core labour standards, which speak principally to the right to decent work. It therefore means that new vision should embrace the need to protect the fundamental rights of workers against employers who seek an unfair advantage, by way of the violation of the core labour standards.

Added to this, it becomes imperative that as part of the decent work agenda, that there is a recognition of the need to maintain a comprehensive social protection programme.

In establishing a platform for sustainable growth, it demands that Government places continual emphasis on health care. These in essence are fundamental towards promoting longevity and a healthy population, and more so, sustain the work life of people, now that the age of retirement has moved to age sixty-five.

It is critical to this process that the policy of free health care remains, thus ensuring that the poor are not denied access to care.



What remains a crucial matter is that Government addresses the question of migrant labour and its potential impact on its delivery of public services.

Whilst it is important to look at the impact that migrant labour could have on housing and health care, the principal concern would be that of the retention of jobs by nationals. It is clear that Government will have to shoulder greater responsibilities, if there is rampant unemployment amongst citizens.

We can conclude that a strong social policy is said to be essential for sustainable growth. The challenge to Barbados as far as social policy development is concerned, is to look to move beyond the realm of a state of social welfarism. This would be consistent with the thinking that is expressed in the Draft National Strategic Plan (2005-2025), that the move to eradicate poverty would be remove the pressure placed on the island's limited resources.

In closing, I must reemphasize the need for wealth creation. Protocol V envisages wealth creation as a development strategy, since it carries with it sustainability which will guarantee social development. The first order of business should remain that of identifying what is needed for wealth creation, to be followed by a determination of how to implement what has been discovered through the establishment of a social partnership in Barbados.

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