

Caribbean Youth Dialogues Intervention

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Forum of the Countries of Latin America & the Caribbean on Sustainable Development

15th April 2024

High tide is encroaching and we are on the front lines! The tide is turbulent and unforgiving; without action the Small Island Developing States **will be left behind**. In this decade of action, we have effectively 6 years to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development– so enough talk -what we truly need is more traction of youth inclusion. We, de yute deep dived into the Caribbean context with a focus on 5 specific SDGs but for the sake of time, we invite you to splash around with us in somewhat shallow discourse.

SDG 1- No Poverty, SDG 2- Zero Hunger, SDG 13-Climate Action, SDG 16- Peace Justice and Strong Institutions, with SDG 17 – Partnerships for goals, completing this bountiful catch. These SDGs were littered along the shoreline and like seashells they were observed with keen interest in terms of the challenges, recommendations to advance their implementation, and an examination of stakeholder engagement of the youth to promote implementation.

In SDG 1 the youth pondered – if the middle class truly existed or is it just the proletariat and bourgeoisie? The Covid-19 pandemic increased poverty with **particular** impact to **marginalized groups**; care workers, female headed households & rural communities to name a few. Environmental challenges and natural disasters in the form of Sahara Dust plumes, forest fires and flash flooding **only exacerbated** our **exasperating** lived experience. Despite these challenges Build Up Barbados a youth-led nonprofit focused on youth empowerment and community development in Bim. Whilst HART's in Haiti focused on youth empowerment and poverty reduction through education. The yute rallied and raved but in the end recommended the rethinking of public policies to engage marginalized and vulnerable groups, that government **should** invest in relevant education and skills development **and** they advocated for greater regional solidarity to tackle poverty head on.

Zero hunger being a major priority, the youths are concerned that to enter any Massy a sou sou will soon be required. How shall we eat with these rising food prices coupled with poor food nutrition? Our imports for food far outweigh our exports but that is for another discussion --. Data from FAO et al (2023) , stated a total of 7.2 million people in 2022 **faced hunger**, that's 17% of the Caribbean Region! So food security, agricultural sector reform, climate change and youth empowerment were tabled for discussion. Our challenges as SIDs are neglect for the agricultural sector, lack of education on food security, lack of data collection and analysis on food consumption patterns and prevailing NCDs.

So what's being done? **Well**, the World Food Programme is on the ground addressing food insecurity in the region via programs and initiatives. Whilst SIDs attack issues from a regional standpoint like Helen's Daughters in St. Lucia empowering rural women **through** adaptive agricultural techniques that fosters economic development in their communities.

So, as we have a listening ear at the moment, *ahem*. Dear stakeholders, invest in climate-resilient agriculture, provide financial support for agricultural startups (we see you 868 with your API programme) and execute on promises for regional food security. The youth are willing to partner with you to achieve these deliverables.

Now, now SIDs, SDG 13 was truly triggered by a few. I won't call names, but just look North of the globe for who...(mhmm). Fragile natural environments, fresh water scarcity, exposure to natural disasters and rising temperatures are at the top of our list. If only we could install an A/C off the coast of Aruba and have it function on energy saver --- blowing cool breeze down to the other islands. But who will pay for servicing every quarter? Never mind, I don't want CARICOM to become the West Indian Federation. Jamaica's Youth Council Climate Advisory Board is a step in the right direction. Let's focus on comprehensive climate education in a decolonized educational curriculum, along with continued adaptation and mitigation strategies by SID governments and the private sector. We rally behind Prime Minister Mia Mottley for **all** member states to uphold **their** NCDs , please prevent that increase of 2.7 degrees!!!

I hope you've been listening as we've touched on partnership for goals throughout, so last but not least, we'll address the promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions for safe societies. Now, in all honesty some of us stopped watching that 7pm news update--not because ignorance is bliss but we have tik-tok and insta updates for that! By this means, our hopes and dreams aren't decimated within an hour but we can incrementally digest all updates in between watching Love Is Blind episodes.

We are being serious, are you taking us seriously? Right now there is a major decline in social cohesion and it's not just because of the generation gap. There is high level of conflict with gun violence, drug trafficking through our porous borders, human trafficking, complex maritime trade challenges and major migrant movement across borders. I could go on but we know crime is costly and impacting the tourism industry. In addition, members of your skilled population keeps running to the North. So what's the plan? A day of prayer by the many religions in our multi-cultural societies can only go so far - remember it's **faith and works**.

Let's talk about the works. Living Free and Better a youth organisation in Haiti aims to assist children and youth with disadvantaged backgrounds. Our key recommendations are armed patrols for those borders, increase public confidence and trust in the relevant authorities and adopt a public health approach to crime and violence as advocated by CARICOM.

Well we can only hope that you listened, we'll wrap up it before our moderator does it for us. But remember - your leadership today will determine if we have a sustainable tomorrow. So in the words of Eddie Grant, "Will they mourn us on the front lines?". Will we be left behind?