

Pressured States and Contested Future –

The Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) and the Restructuring of Governance and the Changing Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the Caribbean

By

Jay W. Johnson and W. Andy Knight

Under the Implementation of the FTAA, this paper examines the dramatic political, economic and social changes expected to impact Caribbean states and the roles of their NGOs in the development and governance processes. The FTAA offers increased hemispheric economic integration and presumably broad material benefits. However, potential economic gains must be understood in the context of political and social realignments, and must be filtered through the region's unique economic structures, history, social relations, political limitations and size. This process exposes a clearer picture of the potential affects the FTAA on Caribbean CARICOM States and their NGOs in the development and governance processes. The unique nature and economic history of the small and micro-states and the increasingly important role of a diversity of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the Caribbean, illustrate their vulnerability to not only the international pressures in the creation of free trade regimes but also to its effects.

This paper argues that despite traditional social divisions the region's NGOs are uniquely poised to play a more significant and collaborative role in the development process of the state both politically and socially under the weight of the FTAA. As on, the one hand, NGOs are increasingly left to "clean-up" the negative social impacts of economic adjustment that free trade and economic neo-liberalism conceives. Yet, on the other hand, NGOs are increasingly being sought politically and professionally to represent the interests of Caribbean civil society in the negotiation processes. This enhanced role has the potential to become more institutional as Caribbean States are increasingly aware of their significant capacity shortfalls in the actual free trade negotiation, implementation and governance processes. The realignments predicated by the FTAA will reshape the Caribbean in unique ways not yet predicted or experienced.