



The World Today

Knowledge Mobility Management: Networking The Caribbean Economy

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“The only way to reverse the disastrous trend to increasing underdevelopment, hard as it is, is to learn to laugh at accepted solutions....” Ivan ILLICH

The globalization of media and the subsequent ‘knowledge economy’ are redefining the concept of territory. As the aging North’s demand for skilled labour increases in a knowledge-based global economy, institutions in the South will have to innovate in their approach to citizenship by embracing the concept of “virtual collaboration”, that is, active and flexible partnerships with local and diasporic students, apprentices and professionals. The South’s capacity to capitalise on the advantages offered now by its ‘network identities’ depends not only on the signing of trade agreements or the goodwill of transnational corporations, but also on the strategic use of technology, social science and community networking through Knowledge Mobility Management.

Knowledge Mobility Management is the meeting point of human resource management, geopolitics and migration studies. It comprises four (4) major elements which I consequently discuss:

A. Migration Research and Forecasting

In addition to forecasting demographic shifts and human capital needs, especially in the North, research geared towards providing a clear understanding of social issues including attitudes towards the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) like the Internet is essential to any successful strategy from governments, firms and NGOs in the South.

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B. Strategic Migration Studies

While also improving education, governments and educational institutions must account for migration in their education and training policies. For a start, one could conduct a survey of attitudes towards migration among persons in the region pursuing educational certification. The Caribbean has historically been the recipient of skilled (though underused) labour. The networking and technology-transfer potential of new immigrant populations should also be explored. Another aspect of strategic migration policy could be the provision of incentives and/or logistical support for migrants to penetrate technology-rich areas and research institutions, including transnational corporations.

C. Diaspora Skills Banks

ICT and ICT-related services are central to the development, maintenance and proper use of national and regional diasporic skills banks. The inability to pool and co-ordinate resources leads to lower levels of impact and misallocation of resources. A primary means of addressing this would be the sharing of skill rosters and databases among states in the South. While current networks such as alumni networks provide an example of what is possible and form the basis for the operation of diasporic skills banks, their biases and limitations should be noted.

D. Virtual Collaboration

The use of ICTs in the networking and technical remittance strategies of the Caribbean Diaspora can be adapted and improved in the implementation of knowledge mobility management strategies. Virtual or remote collaboration as an economic activity is usually the result of communication within and among transnational households. As a result, the promotion of linkages and communication among transnational households through the strengthening of ICT infrastructure should be given priority as a first step towards enabling the rest of our knowledge economy. Knowledge mobility management may also involve taking advantage of pre-existing spaces for information transfer and networking, such as sporting and cultural events in the region and the Diaspora. Events such as the Trinidad Carnival and Cricket World Cup may be good places to start.

The history of the Caribbean and its migration patterns have served to create a complex of global networks based on family and kinship relationships, alumni and religious associations and, more recently, virtual communities. Caribbean identity itself is growing not through reliance on a single cultural or historical base, but a series of transnational and transcultural 'routes' that provide it with its diversity and ultimate potential. This potential, however, is often betrayed by the duplication and discontinuity of efforts by Caribbean individuals, communities, governments, international organisations and NGOs, simply because the region is not aware of the nature and location of the skills and knowledge that lie within its borders and/or the minds of its citizens.

In the final analysis, the relationship between education and economic growth is not automatic. Caribbean societies have embarked solemnly on a mission to create a pool of skilled workers, but are yet to provide a creative, attractive and enabling environment that allows the economy to benefit even if nationals cannot resist the temptation to emigrate.