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FOUR QUESTIONS FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION III- ECONOMIC LIMITATIONS TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION

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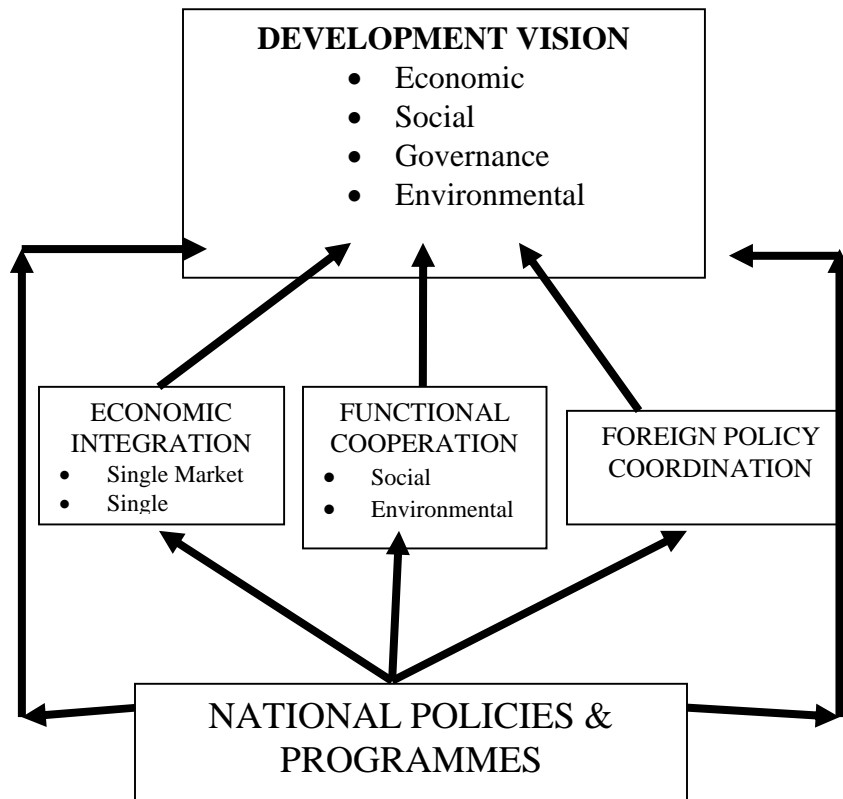
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What are the limitations of a regional integration project that is concerned mainly with the economic aspect? The focus on the Single Market and Economy, while important, carries two risks. One is the perception that integration is mainly about trade and investment and things that are of interest to businesspeople, while having little to offer the ordinary citizen. The other is the risk of ‘over-selling’ the CSME as an economic cure-all. On the most optimistic assumptions the benefits in terms of expanded trade, investment and employment will take time to be realised; and they will be unevenly distributed in the early years.

This argues for economic integration to go beyond the pooling of markets; and for integration as a whole to go beyond just economics. Functional cooperation needs to be receive equal emphasis; in areas that matter to the quality of life of the general population of the Community and in ways in which they can experience a tangible ‘value added’ from its existence. The diagram below illustrates.

Figure 1. The value added of regional integration



Functional cooperation is the sharing of services and the undertaking of joint activities in order to reduce costs and achieve synergies in specific activities. It can take place in economic matters such as research and development, innovation, training and manpower development, transport and telecommunications. It is carried out through joint operation of regional institutions such as the Caribbean Regional Organization for Standards and Quality CROSQ and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute CARDI. Another form is undertaking joint projects such as the Caribbean Renewable Energy Project. This kind of functional cooperation enables the benefits of market integration to more fully realised by increasing labour productivity, and firm-level competitiveness and system-wide competitiveness.

Functional cooperation also happens in social areas including health, education, security, disaster management and sports. CARICOM has a well-established record of functional cooperation in these areas. Many observers believe that these show greater success and more benefits than those that have come about from market integration. Its parity of importance with market integration was recently confirmed by the Heads of Government in a declaration on Functional Cooperation, “A Community For all” at the July 2007 Summit; and by the summit on Non-Communicable Diseases held in Port of Spain in September. And there other elements of functional cooperation that could have significance for the people of the region whose potential has yet to be tapped.

For example, implementation of the *CARICOM Charter for Civil Society*. The Charter was adopted by the Heads of Government ten years ago after an extended period of negotiation with a wide variety of civil society stakeholders. It is a far-reaching document--its 27 Articles address human, civil, political, religious and cultural rights; the rights of indigenous peoples, women, children, and workers, the family and people with disabilities; rights to good governance, participation in the economy, health, education and basic necessities; environmental rights; the role of social partners and awareness and the responsibilities of the people. It provides for monitoring and implementation in great detail. National committees should be constituted with representatives of the state, civil society and ‘persons of eminent character’. These are empowered to analyse implementation and to hear complaints and allegations of non-compliance from private citizens and to submit these to the Conference of Heads of Government through the Secretary General of the Community. In addition, member countries are charged to submit periodic implementation reports to the Secretary General.

Implementation of the Charter, by giving it the same legal force and standing as the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, would constitute a significant addition to the enforceable rights of the citizens of the Community, over and above what they presently enjoy in their respective national jurisdictions. Would it not have an impact if, for example, a citizen of a member states could take his or her government to the Caribbean Court of Justice over an alleged breach of their rights under the Charter? Given the wide-ranging nature of the rights contained in the Charter, the potential impact of such a provision should by no means be underestimated.

The Single Development Vision calls for the legalization of the Charter and this was approved by the Heads of Government. Yet one does not sense great urgency on the matter. The legislative

agenda of CARICOM is of course, very crowded. Getting this in place is going to require significant political pressure on governments from civil society. Its importance lies in the fact that it represents a potentially significant ‘value added’ from the existence of the Community—one that does not rely on market forces and does not require a great deal of money for its implementation.

Another area of functional cooperation of some significance is that of *security*. Homicide rates are on steep increase in several countries in the region and is widely believed to be associated with international drug trafficking. Security is already a subject of functional cooperation and earlier this year the Heads decided to designate it separately as the fourth pillar of integration along with the CSME, functional cooperation, and foreign policy coordination. However, one has the impression that much of the content of security cooperation is externally driven. Of course the sharing of information on so-called persons of interest, alleged narco-traffickers etc. is useful and important. But there are other areas that are equally if not more important in addressing the problem of criminal violence that may be amenable to functional cooperation; for example a regional witness protection programme, cooperation in training and intelligence gathering, sharing of experience in securing community support, smuggling of illegal weapons, and especially the matter of improving the operation of the criminal justice system, which is virtually in a shambles in some of these countries. These do not command the same degree of attention from the metropolitan countries, which are mainly preoccupied with terrorism and narco-trafficking. But we need to set our own agenda in this matter and it is an area in which the Community could aim to prove its worth to its citizens.

In my next article, I will wrap up with questions three and four.

Part One and Two of this series was published on Sunday, October 28th 2007 and Sunday November 11th respectively.