

## BRAZIL AND THE CARIBBEAN IN A CHANGING REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT: Challenges And Prospects\*

It has been argued that traditionally, Caribbean Community (CARICOM) states have not enjoyed strong collaborative linkages with Latin American countries in general, and with Brazil in particular. Several reasons have been advanced, including the view that the impact of colonial bilateralism, which encompassed cultural, political, economic and social relations, constrained the emergence of strong relations between the English-speaking Caribbean states and their Spanish and Portuguese-speaking neighbours. Further, arguments such as linguistic differences, levels of development, differences in physical and population size, natural resource endowments and the presence and persistence of strong external cultural influences have also been advanced. As Mills and Lewis (1982) have observed,

The long political and economic relationships of the English-speaking Caribbean countries with Europe, the extreme dependence of the countries on these relationships for their viability, and the cultural and educational impact of the relationship, have not disposed the people of these countries to think of themselves as being part of the American Continental Zone.

Further, the view has been advanced (Gill, 1995) that a Caribbean perception of itself as a geopolitical unit was not conceivable in an era when the Spanish, British, French and Dutch colonisers introduced a high level of political and economic fragmentation which had the effect of turning the Caribbean away from itself and the Americas toward the European continent.

With the accession to independence of Caribbean states beginning in the 1960s, there were the first, somewhat cautious steps to open up the English-speaking Caribbean to its Latin American neighbours, amidst suspicions and mutual mistrust. In this phase, however, being new entrants into the hemispheric international relations system, and still protected by the United Kingdom, Lewis (1984) argues that Caribbean countries ranked low on the major Latin American countries' 'hierarchy of concern' and further constrained the emergence of a solid relationship between the two regions.

Indeed, in spite of socio-economic similarities, common historical experiences as well as geographic proximity, Caribbean-Latin American relations have seemed to be traditionally underpinned more by their fledgling nature than by firm foundations. In fact as Maira, (1983) noted, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Latin America have appeared to constitute 'two separate worlds which took no notice of each other in spite of their proximity. Separately, they organised their national existence, having as axis a preferential relationship with the countries that fulfilled a hegemonic function with respect to them.'

It has also been observed that governments of CARICOM states have always remained conscious of and sensitive to the small size of their individual states and to the potential fragility of the CARICOM identity in a wider Caribbean environment of larger countries (Lewis, 2005) and this has further limited the depth of their relationships with Latin America.

With respect to Brazil in particular, the situation of limited engagement has traditionally mirrored that of the wider Caribbean-Latin American relations, except in that country's relations with two CARICOM states, Guyana and Suriname, both located in Northern South America and both of which share significant borders with Brazil.

It is against this background that this paper seeks to assess the development of CARICOM-Brazil relations and to discuss the prospects and challenges for the twenty-first century.

In order to place the discussion of Brazil-CARICOM relations in context, it is useful to identify and examine some of the historical antecedents which have impacted on the emergence and development of these relations. It can be said that until the era of World War II, there was no significant interaction between Brazil and the Caribbean except the demarcation of frontiers with Guyana and Suriname which were peacefully settled at the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, Brazil's greatest preoccupation since its independence was its southern borders which it considered vulnerable and this became a

priority foreign policy concern. As Sanders (1987) observed, although Brazil's northern boundaries with other countries sharing the Amazon Basin were unsettled until the early twentieth century, the remoteness and difficulty of access made it less a priority. Ely (1987) further contends that as Great Britain took control of Guyana in the North by 1831, Brazil did not want to run the risk of creating or being involved in any form of conflict with any European power operating in the region and, as such, concentrated its efforts in its Southern frontier region.

It was in the period of World War II that Brazil's interest in the Caribbean generally, and in Guyana specifically, developed. The presence of US naval and aerial bases in Guyana and the English-speaking Caribbean was seen as an 'undesirable North American presence in the Amazon' (Ely, 1987) and Brazil demonstrated great concern for the possible 'internationalisation' of the Amazon region since that time. However, it was not until the 1970s that Brazil reversed its traditional aloofness towards hemispheric and Caribbean issues and influenced a series of initiatives including the Treaty for Amazonian Cooperation, high level Presidential visits to neighbouring states, heightened participation in multilateral diplomacy and a preference for increased collaboration with Third World countries. At the same time, however, concerns about Brazil's hegemonic intentions and Latin America's increasing interest in the Caribbean emerged in the region and influenced the view that the growing interest in the Caribbean by Latin America was 'tantamount to an attempt to recolonise the region' (Williams, 1975).

The Cold War period saw Brazil's active interest in the Caribbean, including its military presence in the Dominican Republic in 1965 after the United States intervention there; its interest in the Guyana-Venezuela border issue (1970); its concern with Guyana's radical foreign policy behaviour, including its links with Cuba and the Eastern European states (1975); Brazil's preoccupation with Suriname's active collaboration with Cuba and its role in the reduction of a strong Cuban presence in the country (1983). The signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973 which established the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was also significant since it included in its objectives, the expansion of trade and economic relations with third countries. This signalled the beginning of an effort by CARICOM states to coordinate foreign policy activity and to gradually engage Latin American countries.

Undoubtedly, participation in fora such as the Organization American States, (OAS), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

(ECLAC) the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB) The Latin America Economic System (SELA), The Latin American and Caribbean Sugar Producers' Association (GEPLACEA), the Group on Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) at the United Nations among others, established the foundation for a better grasp and understanding of the foreign policy behaviour of Latin American states, like Brazil. It must be noted also that there were also significant differences in foreign policy positions at the same time. Brazil supported Argentina during the Falklands/Malvinas war, while all the CARICOM states, with the exception of Grenada sided with the Anglo-American bloc. Further, Brazil did not support the Reagan administration's Caribbean Basin Initiative since it was seen by Brazil as insufficient and inappropriate as a solution to the basic challenges facing the region at that time. Further, in 1983, Brazil condemned the US-led intervention in Grenada, since it violated the principle of non-intervention as enshrined in the UN and OAS Charters. Additionally, the military regime in Brazil in the mid 1970s expressed its concern at the decision of the four major and influential CARICOM states, Guyana, Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica, in 1972, to establish formal diplomatic relations with Cuba. These differences of positions and interests served to ensure that a diplomatic and political 'distance' remained between CARICOM and Brazil.

It was however, the West Indian Commission which brought to the region's attention the urgent need to broaden and deepen Caribbean multilateralism and to establish mechanisms for harmonizing relations and functional cooperation with the wider Caribbean. However, even though the West Indian Commission had recognized the need for stronger links with Brazil, CARICOM continued to be cautious in its approaches and engagement with Brazil in the 1990s. In the West Indian Commission Report, *Time For Action*, (1992), the potential advantages of collaboration with Brazil were clearly articulated:

We believe that for the future, it will be important for CARICOM to seek to strengthen relationships with Brazil. Its location, the ethnic make-up of the country's population and its rising status as a rapidly industrializing state, all point to advantages to us in pursuing this orientation.

It can be said, however, that the establishment of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), which was a main recommendation of the West Indian Commission, was created with a limited geographical definition which

excluded Brazil, and this omission could be described as a tactical error since Brazil, an emerging regional leader, had demonstrated interest in CARICOM and was already increasing its reach and influence in its two neighbouring CARICOM states, Guyana and Suriname. Lewis (2005) has contended that CARICOM missed an important opportunity to develop a long term interest in an institutionalised diplomacy which links its own interest in the South American mainland through the ACS to Brazil's interest in the southern flank of CARICOM (Guyana and Suriname) and expand the space for CARICOM economic activity at the same time.

As the last decade of the twentieth century unfolded, however, regional and global changes emerged which influenced the convergence of interests between CARICOM and Brazil. Critical issues such as the impact of globalization on developing states, a renewed awareness of the vital role of economic cooperation, common challenges including the HIV/AIDS pandemic, environmental and security concerns, among others, all served to stimulate active collaboration between CARICOM and Brazil. Additionally, new opportunities for interaction emerged, including CARICOM's participation in the Rio Group, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro among other fora, while at the same time, common regional and global interests appeared. Further, Brazil, in the 1990s, moved to establish itself as a major player in the regional and international arena and influenced the establishment of MERCOSUR, along with Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. At the same time, Brazil renewed efforts to reinvigorate the Treaty for Amazonian Cooperation, and played a leading role at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations. All of these developments, events and diplomatic activities saw the involvement of CARICOM states and increased the level of interaction, if not understanding, in a significant way.

It was at the beginning of the twenty first century and after the election of President Ignacio Lula Da Silva that there was increased momentum in Brazilian foreign policy activity in the region and it also brought about an activist phase in Brazilian foreign policy behaviour in the developing world in general and in the Caribbean in particular. On his assumption of office, President Lula presented a vision of a global paradigm based on solidarity with the developing world and strong collaborative linkages with Brazil's neighbours, including the CARICOM states. Indeed, it has been posited that the election of President Lula in Brazil served to change Brazil's role in the hemisphere in important ways. With Brazilian influence and leadership,

MERCOSUR has emerged as 'the nexus for the consolidation of a resurgent South America' and the country has also emerged as a counterbalance to the United States with respect to the interests of small hemispheric states, like those of the Caribbean, in the FTAA negotiations. Further, given the priority now being given by Brazil to continental integration, CARICOM states are now being encouraged to develop strategies which can ensure the achievement of more balanced hemispheric relations.

What will be the catalyst, therefore, in the twenty first century which will create increased levels of cooperation between the states of CARICOM and Brazil?

The need for a sustained level of engagement with Brazil by the countries of CARICOM has been articulated, especially in the context of the aggressive postures currently adopted by the United States in the global arena, and that country's pursuit of hegemonic policies in the region. Further, given the changing objectives of the developed, industrialized world, the loss of special consideration for small states like those of CARICOM, the reduction and impending elimination of preferential trade arrangements, along with the changing global and regional economic and political configurations have set the stage for the emergence of a new agenda in CARICOM-Brazil relations.

The several political, economic and security challenges which face CARICOM in the twenty-first century can be addressed through a strategic alliance, increased collaboration and structured programmes of cooperation with Brazil. In the area of security, CARICOM states continue to be challenged, especially in the context of ever-increasing levels of drug-trafficking, trafficking in persons, the illicit trade and manufacture of firearms and other forms of transnational crimes, as well as the porous borders of member states like Guyana, Suriname, Belize and Haiti, which represent potential threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity. Further, resource constraints, both human and financial, the organizational limitations of the Caribbean Regional Security System (RSS), as well as the limited defence and security capabilities of CARICOM member states leave the region exposed and vulnerable to threats from terrorism and to its stability security and territorial integrity.

On the other hand, Brazil has, since the 1990s, become actively involved in providing support for international peacekeeping operations around the world and for nearly two years has been leading the peacekeeping force in a CARICOM state, Haiti. Further, Brazil has developed and operationalized the Amazonian Surveillance System (SIVAM), which can be extended to

provide support and coordinate intelligence sharing with CARICOM. One can therefore support the view that a mutual defence and security agreement between CARICOM and Brazil and the establishment of a rapid deployment force as part of an extended Regional Security System (RSS) should be considered as part of the new CARICOM-Brazil agenda.

Sanders (2005) has posited that theoretically, such an agreement between certain Latin American states and CARICOM could act as a deterrent to intervention even by the United States since it would bring some degree of balance to the conventional military force in the hemisphere. In fact, such an arrangement could facilitate increased intelligence gathering and sharing, joint operations including the patrolling of international waterways, search and rescue operations and intervention in disaster zones as well as joint training for capacity building and the development of skills for effective deterrence. It can also be posited that this collaboration could be extended to include the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), which is tasked with the mandate to respond immediately and in a coordinated way to disasters in any member state that determines an emergency response necessary. Given CDERA's human resource and technical limitations, and Brazil's capacity in natural disaster risk management, it will be in the interest of CARICOM to develop synergies with Brazil as part of a broad security arrangement. While, as Sanders argues, any defence agreement in the hemisphere without its participation will be viewed negatively by the United States, it can be argued that such an initiative could seriously confront the several security challenges which face the region and provide a rapid deployment capability to CARICOM states in response to terrorist threats and natural disasters.

The challenges facing CARICOM as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic have been significant. In fact, CARICOM sees the HIV/AIDS crisis as not only a public health issue but also a major constraint to development. It is generally agreed that this issue must be confronted through collective action and a multi-sector, multi-partner approach. Brazil is highly regarded as a model in the fight against HIV/AIDS, recording a 70% reduction in AIDS-related deaths in the past three years. It is therefore important for the CARICOM/Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP) to further cooperation with Brazil so that there could be benefits to CARICOM/PANCAP from the strategies and mechanisms which Brazil has successfully developed.

CARICOM has now placed significant attention on tourism as a development pole and in a majority of CARICOM states, the tourism sector

remains the major foreign exchange earner. It is now agreed that states of the region need to shift from 'commodity tourism' into 'niche tourism', and into areas such as entertainment, cultural and educational tourism. This allows the opportunity for enhanced relations with Brazil and for the possibility of multi-destination tourist packages, with the beaches of the Caribbean and the Amazon rainforest being marketed to increase the sectoral linkage. Further, the development of English Language programmes, geared toward Brazilian participants can form part of the 'educational' tourism arrangement. The University of Guyana and the University of the West Indies can offer attractive 'total immersion' English Language courses which can have the effect of increasing contact among the citizens of CARICOM and Brazil and at the same time, promote better understanding and generate income for the institutions. In addition, the international appeal of reggae, calypso and soca music which have their cultural roots in CARICOM has opened the way for the emergence of a potentially lucrative 'entertainment tourism' sector and the marketing of this element in Brazil, especially in the northern states, could have positive results for CARICOM's cultural entrepreneurs.

There has been concern raised by CARICOM with respect to the challenge to the European Union sugar regime led by Brazil and Australia at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2002. The view from CARICOM is that if the challenge is successful, it would be disastrous for CARICOM states whose economies depend significantly on the sugar industry. Further, CARICOM states produce less than 750,000 tonnes of sugar per annum and it has been argued that these small countries pose no threat to Brazil which produces approximately twenty-two million tonnes of sugar per annum. From a CARICOM perspective, therefore, there is a significantly greater role for sugar in the small vulnerable CARICOM economies in comparison to the large and more developed and diversified Brazilian economy. This is a crucial issue for the small CARICOM sugar producing states and it is vital that an understanding of the potential economic and social disaster be developed by Brazil.

While Brazil has argued that hurting CARICOM sugar exports is not that country's intention, there are lingering concerns among the sugar-exporting states of the region. Addressing the issue at the CARICOM Heads of Government in Suriname in February 2005, President Lula argued that Brazil questioned the revision of practices which violate international trade norms and which bring about serious distortions in the international market, and which impact negatively on developing countries. President Lula posited

that it was against this background of illegitimate subsidies given by the European Union that Brazil moved to the WTO on the issue. As an indication of Brazil's commitment to expand relations with CARICOM, President Lula noted that Brazil 'never questioned the trade preferences given to CARICOM states by the European Union'. It is important to note that Brazil recognized the potential negative impact of reduced sugar exports on CARICOM states and President Lula offered Brazilian resources and expertise in the diversification of sugar and the production of ethanol in the CARICOM states. As he noted, 'as an expression of our intentions, we wish to increase our cooperation...we will launch programmes of technical capacity building in the sugar-ethanol sector and jointly market the product'.

It is therefore important for CARICOM to act decisively and to secure firm commitments from Brazil to reduce the impact of the potential economic losses from sugar on the lives of the people in the region. These commitments must include partnerships in the area of ethanol production, especially since the diversification of the sugar industry would assist in offsetting the repercussions of the recent European Union (EU) decision to cut preferential prices on sugar produced by African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. Further, this alternative form of energy – ethanol – would present CARICOM sugar producing states with another avenue for income generation and foreign currency earnings and a new and better opportunity to cope in the competitive global market which has emerged. It is also envisaged that there will be an increased demand for alcohol as fuel as fossil fuel prices rise and the impact of the Kyoto Protocol widens globally and CARICOM can benefit substantially by directing a part of the sugar cane output to ethanol, which can be marketed as an environmentally friendly substitute for gasoline additives. In order to ensure sustained coordination, the role of the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) in the process of the scientific exchanges with Brazil in the agricultural sector is crucial and will have to be given urgent priority in this decade.

In order to develop the trade and commercial relations with Brazil, it is also important that CARICOM move swiftly to tap the large Brazilian market and establish niches for CARICOM products. For the last five years, Brazil has recorded significant and consistent trade surpluses with all CARICOM states. The data indicate (CARICOM Secretariat) that in 2004, Brazilian exports to CARICOM reached a record level of US\$783 million and imports to Brazil from CARICOM totalled US\$73million. It is therefore imperative that CARICOM seeks to increase trade with Brazil, especially the northern

states which are geographically proximate to the region. The challenge therefore, is for CARICOM states to ensure that they take advantage of Brazil's desire to facilitate the expansion of trade with the region and develop aggressive marketing strategies to offset the current trade imbalance.

The establishment of the South American Community of Nations (SACN) in 2004 has added another dimension to the potential development of CARICOM-Brazil relations. This Brazilian initiative, which contemplates a union of MERCOSUR and the Andean Community with the addition of CARICOM member states, Guyana and Suriname, provides for the integration of physical infrastructure and the coordination of common political and diplomatic efforts aimed at strengthening the region's position in the international arena. In the first place, the physical integration of South America, through the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA) provides the opportunity for Guyana and Suriname as CARICOM member states to provide the physical link between CARICOM and Brazil. The road link between Guyana and the Brazilian state of Roraima will not only serve to facilitate the linking of the Northern states of Brazil and the Guianas, but it will also provide critical access for Brazil to the Caribbean, North and Central America and Europe. Further, from a CARICOM perspective, the SACN will assist in the emergence of a more balanced level of hemispheric relations and provide further scope for the development of trade and commercial links with South America.

There are, however, those who advocate that an isolationist approach should be adopted by Brazil and contend that there are serious domestic issues including unequal income distribution, poverty, high unemployment and corruption in government, which should be seen as important and urgent priorities for the Brazilian government. Further, some argue that the Brazilian government currently demonstrates little concern about the multiple challenges facing local communities and is only concentrating its efforts on enhancing its image abroad. On the other hand, some concerns by CARICOM political actors about the seeming push towards closer relations with Latin America in general, and with Brazil in particular, still remain. There is the perception in CARICOM states that the major players in the Americas demonstrate little respect or regard for the geopolitical concerns of the small states of the region. Further, there are arguments advanced that the widening of relations at this time would undermine the further development of a CARICOM identity and would allow for the cultural influences from Latin America to dominate the small states of the region. There is also the view that further Brazilian

involvement could emasculate CARICOM solidarity and initiative and lead to new forms of dependency.

Undoubtedly, both CARICOM and Brazil have recognized that their relationship, which has been in its embryonic stages for more than two decades, must emerge quickly and as a priority. At the sixteenth Inter-Sessional Meeting of CARICOM Heads held in Suriname in February 2005, attended by President Lula, the first Brazilian President to participate in a CARICOM summit meeting, regional governments openly endorsed the desirability of building a strategic alliance with Brazil. As CARICOM's Chairman, Dr. Ronald Venetiaan, observed,

Caribbean countries have been historically oriented towards Western Europe and North America. It is the highest time that we realize that, besides an eastern and a northern border, the Caribbean also has a southern border and beyond that border there is a great potential of markets, technology and culture.

Further, President Lula Da Silva, addressing the Summit, argued for a solid relationship between Brazil and CARICOM. As he noted, Brazil is 'mature and ready for an alliance which can realize our potential for cooperation in the struggle for a more just world.' Both Brazil and CARICOM have therefore expressed a firm commitment to building a new economic and commercial geography in which joint initiatives could present mutual benefits. It therefore means that there will have to be the political will on both sides to transform geographical proximity to a sustainable network of economic, political and social activity. New tensions may emerge especially in relation to the future of the US-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the position of Brazil and the other MERCOSUR states along with Venezuela, which converged to oppose the restarting of the negotiations at the recent Summit of the Americas in Argentina, in contrast to CARICOM's 'wait and see' position, which could lead to the renewal of suspicions and distrust on both sides. However, CARICOM and Brazil, while still with differing positions on some global and regional issues are also natural partners with converging interests and these present significant potential for cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, therefore, there are urgent strategies which have to be adopted to structure and sustain CARICOM-Brazil relations. In the first place, CARICOM must continue to vigorously pursue Brazilian support for its position at the WTO, that the small, open and vulnerable economies like those of CARICOM, must be placed in a separate and distinct category and be allowed special preferences because the volume of their export trade does not provide any threat to the larger economies like Brazil, or to the world trading system and that 'special and differential' treatment is crucial in order for CARICOM to survive and sustain its development.

Further, while still moving towards the deepening of its integration process, CARICOM must effectively utilize its geographical proximity to network with Brazil for mutual economic and social benefit, as that country attains influential regional and global power status. The development of a robust trading partnership with Brazil can also demonstrate that emerging Latin American powers and Small Caribbean states can become involved in constructive and fair trade arrangements without having to rely on US supervision and therefore reduce CARICOM dependency on the United States. One can therefore concur with the view that the opportunity cost of an unrealized relationship can be high for CARICOM, given Brazil's leverage in the hemisphere and in critical global forums. It therefore becomes imperative that CARICOM take a pro-active stance and engage Brazil in this century.

## NOTES

1. In 1972, Commonwealth Caribbean leaders agreed to transform the Caribbean Free Trade Association into a Common Market and establish the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), of which the Common Market would be an integral part. The signing of the Treaty establishing the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was held at Chaguaramas, Trinidad, on July 04, 1973.
2. The objectives of the Community, identified in Article 6 of the Revised Treaty, are: to improve standards of living and work; the full employment of labour and other factors of production; accelerated, coordinated and sustained economic development and convergence; expansion of trade and economic relations with third States; enhanced levels of international competitiveness; organization for increased production and productivity; achievement of a greater measure of economic leverage and effectiveness of Member States in dealing with third States, groups of States or entities of any description and the enhanced co-ordination of Member States' foreign and foreign economic policies and enhanced functional co-operation.

3. The Member States of CARICOM are:
- Antigua and Barbuda
  - The Bahamas
  - Barbados
  - Belize
  - Dominica
  - Grenada
  - Guyana
  - Haiti
  - Jamaica
  - Montserrat
  - Saint Lucia
  - St. Kitts and Nevis
  - St. Vincent and the Grenadines
  - Suriname
  - Trinidad and Tobago

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