

# Caribbean integration movement

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The integration movement in the Caribbean has been envisioned in days as far back as the West Indian Federation (the original CARICOM) where diverse Caribbean states joined with the intention of creating a political unit that would become independent from Britain as a single state, much like the successful Canadian Federation. This short-lived attempt at regional integration unfortunately collapsed before any real development could be made. The reincarnation of this motion, however, occurred in 1973, 15 years after the West Indian Federation, in the form of The Caribbean Community, CARICOM, with much of the initial motives intact.

However, many challenges hinder the progress of CARICOM, in particular, the different levels of development of its member states, thus thwarting regional integration. Economic factors such as productivity levels, social factors such as education which relate to the employment rates and literacy of citizens, as well as the political, and geopolitical factors with respects to natural resources such as oil and natural gas, are a few of the issues which suppress the success of integration as envisioned by CARICOM.

The ideology of CARICOM is that as an integrated region, the Caribbean would be capable of much greater economic development and global competitiveness than as single entities. This means that all members of CARICOM would be required to contribute and as such would each be entitled to benefits which would aid in both the individual development of the states and the development of the Caribbean as a whole. However, at present the economies of many of the islands are not as successful as others, for example, the contrast between the economies of Haiti and the Bahamas.

One reason for the difference in levels of development in several islands is the availability of natural resources in some while others depend solely on tourism. Therefore, this disparity in the level of development between the member states results in the delay of regional integration as citizens of smaller and less developed islands may find it profitable to migrate to larger, more economically developed islands to increase their standards of living.

This would, as a consequence, further impede the development of the smaller island state as labour would be exiting the country. The effects of such an action are presently seen in countries such as Africa, whose economic development was greatly impacted because of the slave trade. The productivity level will also be affected by migration as the link between production levels and labour is evident.

Apart from affecting the productivity levels of the various states, the disparity in the level of development amongst the states can also have negative implications on each state's education level. With free labour mobility within the region, less developed countries face the problem of suffering a brain drain. Free movement of labour so far has been limited to a small group of employment categories, such as mobility of doctors and surgeons within the Caribbean.

Though further progress in this area is on the cards, it is a great risk for the smaller counties. Employment rates will plunge greatly in these countries as more job opportunities will become available in the larger or more developed states, leaving them in a worse position than before the integration movement began, since without a sufficient labour force, little development

can be made. An obvious sub consequence of this brain drain which would also jeopardise the economic progress of the smaller states is the literacy of the remaining citizens.

If the more proficient citizens left these states, then the general rate of literacy throughout the state will decrease, limiting the states' abilities for development. It is natural for each individual state to have on their personal agenda, ideas and plans concerning the fulfilment of policies, reforms and other mandates for national sustainable development. However, though both national and regional developments are important, many states are less focused on achieving regional goals. Political and geopolitical issues concerning trade laws and oil diplomacy are problems affecting regional integration.

The political issue at hand however is the question of whether trade agreements under the CSME facilitates the advancement of individual and regional trade interests, an issue which is believed to have also contributed to the dissolution of the West Indian Federation. The Bahamas, for example, is a full member of CARICOM but oppose the CSME as they are against the Free Trade Agreement. This is because they fear that with the free trade zone proposed by CARICOM, their economy will be inundated by foreign labourers, causing its employment to swell.