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# **Enhancing the Voice of the Caribbean in the Summit Process**

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## **About the Hemispheric Think Tank Working Group in Support of the 2009 Summit of the Americas**

This paper was produced as part of the Hemispheric Think Tank Working Group in Support of the 2009 Summit of the Americas, a joint project of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) and the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD) with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The Working Group brought together researchers and policy analysts from the Western Hemisphere's leading think tanks to engage in intensive debate and dialogue and develop a strong intellectual and policy foundation for preparing and conducting the Summit.

In meetings in Ottawa and Washington, D.C., attended by leading national and multilateral officials, the group explored the critical problems the Summit could address, identified key areas of agreement and disagreement among countries, deeply probed the disagreements, and, where possible, sought to develop pragmatic approaches. These discussions and research have resulted in a series of policy papers that hope to mobilize and raise awareness of the Summit amongst regional governments and civil society.

## **The Summit Process**

The Summit of the Americas brings together the Heads of State and Government of the Western Hemisphere to discuss common concerns, seek solutions and develop a shared vision for their further development of the region, be it economic, social or political in nature.

Formally, the entity responsible for the coordination and implementation of mandates, agreed on by the Heads of State and Government, at the Summits is the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) together with the Organization of American States (OAS) Office of Summit Follow-up which has become the Secretariat of the Summit Process. An important focus of the SIRG Executive Council is the deepening of partnerships with and coordination between the Summit Process and its partner institutions including the OAS, Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Corporación Andina de Fomento (CAF), World Bank, Caribbean Development Bank, International Organization for Migration, International Labour Organization, and Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA).

The dialogue of Heads of State and Government is informed by positions developed by policy advisors to the governments of each member state. In turn, these advisors are influenced by the work of policy analysts, think tanks and the research conducted by universities and academic institutions in the respective member states.

## **The Voice of the Caribbean in the Summits**

There is a widely-held view that the problems and perspectives of some countries, in particular the smaller island states of the Caribbean, are not well incorporated in the Summit Process. Several factors contribute to this perceived problem, including the fragmented approach to problem definition, differences in perspectives arising from different endowment levels, levels of indebtedness and stages of development. While it is unlikely that all of these differences can be overcome and that the small countries of the region will speak with a single voice, nevertheless it may be possible for them to be more articulate and coherent in representing their view if there is a greater level of cooperation between the policy advisors, policy analysts, think tanks and academic institutions in these countries in preparation for the Summits, and if partner institutions such as those listed above participate in these preparatory and subsequent follow-up meetings. (A summary of the developmental challenges and opportunities of the Caribbean countries is in the appendix.)

## **Pragmatic Responses to the Caribbean Lack of Voice at the Summits**

1. Strengthening of think tanks and university-based research groups that can contribute in a consistent and sustained manner to the policy analysis activities, policy debates and policy formulation processes in the countries of the region.
2. More frequent engagement of these think tanks and university-based research groups with private sector groups, NGOs and partner institutions in preparation for the Summits to examine the themes and to develop coherent positions that might better inform the development of national positions to be presented by the Heads of Government at the Summit. The specific objectives of these meetings would include exchange of information, deepening of analysis, identification of common positions and areas of difference, and formulation of solutions to challenges. These meetings and discussions might usefully identify areas of concern which warrant further sustained analysis and which might benefit from harnessing the resources and policy priorities of the multilateral partner institutions. They might also be useful in highlighting mechanisms by which the countries of the region can emphasize their areas of common interest and minimize their differences in order to project a louder voice in the multilateral forum.
3. Regional institutions, such as the University of the West Indies, CARICOM Secretariat, Caribbean Development Bank and the emerging regional think tanks such as the Caribbean Policy Research Institute may have a particularly important role in coordinating and convening their meetings in a timely manner to have an impact on the positions of the countries at the Summit.

## Appendix

### Toward an Understanding of the Developmental Challenges of the Caribbean

There are a number of **positive characteristics of the Caribbean** today:

- Several countries continue to experience sustained growth in per capita incomes, some becoming middle income countries and achieving high levels of human development.
- High levels of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in many countries of the region.
- These achievements may reflect the positive endowments that the Caribbean has been blessed with. These include excellent climates and breathtaking physical environment and favorable location close to the largest economy in the world and centrally placed between the large economies to the north and south of the hemisphere.
- The advantage of English language in most countries (with other important modern languages such as Spanish, French and Dutch in the others).
- Early targeting of universal primary and secondary education.
- Strong traditions of democratic participation and political stability in most countries.
- A significant degree of regional integration despite significant differences in economic and social characteristics.

At the same time, there are a number of **critical developmental challenges** faced by the small nations of the Caribbean. These include:

- Small size of the countries.
- Vulnerability to natural disasters and external shocks (i.e. oil price movements).
- Challenging international environment which has rendered many traditional sectors uncompetitive and requiring a significant transformation in the production structure of most economies.

- Open economies which render them vulnerable to wide and rapid swings in energy, food and other commodity prices.
- Concentration of FDI in a few natural resource-related sectors (especially tourism, mineral extraction and segments within agriculture) indicating that as of now the region possesses only a few globally competitive sectors.
- High levels of outward migration reflecting inadequate access to economic opportunity for many of the regions educated people.
- Unemployment among youth, which has severe implications for poverty and income distribution, as well as serving to enhance the attractiveness of gang activity, drug trafficking and addiction.
- Although poverty has declined, high levels of poverty remain in some countries.
- High and growing crime rates.
- Location between the large drug producing and drug consuming nations of the hemisphere which make them ideal transshipment locations in the logistic chain and renders them vulnerable to money laundering, arms trafficking and increased drug-related crime.
- High levels of indebtedness in some countries which limits the capacity of the governments to respond to the above challenges, makes the countries more susceptible to external shocks, increases the risk of macro instability and compromises growth prospects.

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The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to strengthening Canadian relations with Latin America and the Caribbean through policy dialogue and analysis. By providing key stakeholders with solutions-oriented research on social, political and economic issues, we strive to create new partnerships and policy options throughout the Western Hemisphere. FOCAL promotes good governance, economic prosperity and social justice, basing our work on principles of intellectual integrity, racial diversity and gender equality.

La Fundación Canadiense para las Américas (FOCAL) es un instituto independiente que se dedica al fortalecimiento de las relaciones entre Canadá y los países de América Latina y el Caribe mediante el análisis y el diálogo sobre políticas. Buscamos la creación de nuevos vínculos y opciones de política para el Hemisferio Occidental a través de la investigación que aborda soluciones sobre temas sociales, políticos y económicos. FOCAL promueve buena gobernabilidad, prosperidad económica y justicia social, basando nuestro trabajo en principios de integridad intelectual, diversidad racial y equidad de género.

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