Development of a Caribbean Urban Agenda in the Context of Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

Among the fundamental challenges faced by the Caribbean is the impact of globalisation and trade liberalisation. At the same time Caribbean countries, like many other developing nations, are contending with the accelerated pace of urbanisation. The Caribbean is a highly urbanised region with over 70 percent of its population currently living in urban settlements.[1] These settlements are nodes where social, political, economic and environmental factors increasingly shape Caribbean developmental challenges and opportunities.

With these challenges and opportunities in mind, the Network for the Application of Science and Technology to the Urban Sector[2] (NSUS) project's First Annual Policy Meeting was convened in Guyana in April 2011. This meeting was the first **Caribbean Urban Forum** and brought together policymakers from nine CARICOM Member States, academics from five regional and extra-regional universities, representatives from the professional planning associations in Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados as well as Canada and the United States and civil society representation. The meeting aimed to provide a space for **reassessing strategic priorities related to urban and land management in the Caribbean, improving data management systems for urban management and creating creation of a Caribbean wide planning association**.

This meeting was guided by the Regional Policy Framework for Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) of the Caribbean Council for Science and Technology (CCST) which was **endorsed** by the Second Joint Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) and the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) held in January 2008 in Guyana. The STI Policy Framework aims to provide a set of guiding principles for the promotion, application and attainment of excellence in

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[1] UN-Habitat (2009).*Planning Sustainable Cities. Global Report on Human Settlements.* 2009.
[2] Funded under the EU-ACP, NSUS is a project concerned with the uptake of research into policy making in the Caribbean and reciprocally utilize policy decisions to inform and guide research in urban and land management through the advisory board and thematic technical advisory groups. The project will contribute to poverty alleviation in the urban areas of the Caribbean by placing socially relevant science, technology and innovation (STI) at the heart of applied research and policy making. For additional information on project activities see http://bluespacecaribbean.com/projects/nsus/

Science, Technology and Innovation and for meeting social and economic goals at the national and regional level in the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Urban Forum **recommended** the development of a Caribbean Urban Agenda that is holistic and comprehensive framework which would be continuously informed by dialogue and by a monitoring and evaluation framework. The Meeting identified that the Framework should include high and low thematic priority programmes, a research agenda, a knowledge management facility and capacity building.

2. Identifying the *Problématique*

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) has noted that there is no internationally agreed definition of urban areas, and national definitions vary from country to country. Consistency in the breakdown of what constitutes urban and rural areas is problematic. With growth, the boundaries of urban areas change over time. Generally, an urban area is characterised by population size, land mass, land use or localities of administrative or commercial importance. For national purposes as well as for international comparability, the most appropriate unit of classification is the size of locality or, if this is not possible, the smallest administrative division of the country. Nevertheless, given the differences in characteristics that may distinguish one urban area from another across nations and regions, it would be useful for a regional recommendation on the matter.

Caribbean cities are very diverse in terms of their absolute and relative size, annual growth rates and their economic, social and environmental opportunities and their vulnerabilities. Thus, absolute comparisons between territories may not be entirely valid. This requires a functional and relevant classification system.

Caribbean societies are unique in having been created by European economic and strategic needs. The original instrument for this domination was the plantations that effected the migration of labourers from Africa and Asia. As scholars have noted, this historical context continues to exert an important influence in determining the structure and growth of major urban centres in the region today. Many Caribbean urban areas have very high percentages of informal and unplanned development that has become or is becoming unsustainable. Further, urban planning and management is embedded in

colonial laws and regulations and lacks adequate development and implementation of policies as well as enforcement of rules and regulations.

This state of affairs is further compounded by the inability of city authorities to effectively manage the consequences of urban growth. As **Table 1** shows the region is likely to face unprecedented rates of growth in the next two decades.

TABLE 1: URBAN GROWTH AMONG CARICOM COUNTRIES, 2010-2030								
Country	**Capital City**	**Area**	**Density** *(2000)*	**Urban population** *(thousands)*	**Urban annual growth** (%)			
		Km^2	**Km^2**	**2010**	**2010-2015**	**2015-2020**	**2020-2025**	**2025-2030**
Antigua and Barbuda	St. John's	10	3,100	1.39	1.90	2.37	2.40	1.39
Bahamas	Nassau	207	1,202.6	291	1.35	1.23	1.11	0.96
Barbados	Bridgetown	38.8	-	114	1.65	1.51	1.32	1.08
Belize	Belmopan	-	-	164	2.73	2.58	2.38	2.16
Dominica	Roseau	-	-	45	0.31	0.50	0.83	0.67
Grenada	St. George's	-	-	41	1.59	1.65	1.54	1.26
Guyana	Georgetown	51.8	51.8	218	0.49	0.89	1.23	1.32
Haiti	Port-au-Prince	36.04	19,555.4	5 307	3.91	3.13	2.50	2.00
Jamaica	Kingston	480	1,358	1 420	0.61	0.77	0.86	0.88
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Basseterre	6.1	2,541	17	1.85	2.19	2.46	2.40
Saint Lucia	Castries	79	776.5	49	1.64	1.97	2.24	2.43
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Kingstown	-	-	54	1.03	1.17	1.26	1.26
Suriname	Paramaribo	-	-	364	1.45	1.30	1.16	1.01
Trinidad and Tobago	Port of Spain	-	3,650	186	2.97	2.93	2.81	2.59

Source: UN Population Division for data and Wikipedia for area

As a result of multiple challenges - unclear definitions, population explosion, provision of services for residents, servicing the transit population, provision of modern infrastructure, enhancing urban governance - it is essential that an urban agenda be developed to guide and respond to the issues of urban areas and urbanisation. This should be supported by the development of a formal professional organisation that can legitimately elaborate on urban public policies.

3. From a Global to a Regional Perspective

Urban issues and urban development have regained attention after a relative period of dormancy. The 'urban agenda' is largely driven from a global perspective[3] which has its roots in the work of multilateral agencies such as UN Habitat and geographical groupings such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and academic literature.[4] The issues that have been put on the agenda relate to both actual urban concerns such as access to basic services, housing, and security but also the manner in which these issues are handled, that is, governance and management. **Table 2** highlights some of the issues feeding the global urban agenda.

TABLE 2: ISSUES ON THE GLOBAL AGENDA	
URBAN AGENDA	**ISSUES**
Safety and Security	crime and violence, natural and environmental disasters disaster management, tenure (in)security
Poverty & Deprivation	(un)employment, education and health, food security
Physical Living Conditions	access to water and sanitation, solid waste management, housing quality
Inequality	social exclusion, gender equality, segregation/marginalization
Climate Change	*contribution to:* emissions, energy, dependence on energy import, transportation, mitigation strategies, green economy
	vulnerability to: floods, hurricanes, storm surges, low-elevation coastal zone, sea level rise coastal and marine resources, ecological fragility, adaptation strategies
Governance	citizen participation, decentralization, democratization, public private partnerships, capacity building, knowledge management
Sustainable Planning	environmental, social, physical, economic
Local Economic Development	liberalization/globalization, small economy, dependent economy, formal/informal economy, tourism dependent, diversification

Multilateral agencies have subsequently developed a wide range of programmes to improve urban conditions in various critical domains of urban life such as crime and violence, public safety, access to water and sanitation, urban-rural linkages as well as issues relating to the managing or governing or cities such as participatory governance and decentralisation. As a result, programmes such as the *Urban Management Program (UMP)*, *The Localizing Agenda 21 (LA21)*, *City Alliances*, *Safer City Program* and

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[3] The issues that have been put on the global agenda relate to both actual urban concerns such as access to basic services, housing, and security but also to the manner in which these issues are handled, i.e. management and governance issues. Reviewing the documents, articles and approaches that feature this international agenda, it becomes clear that two UN policies feed these new urban initiatives: the *Second UN Habitat Agenda (1996)* and the *Millennium Development Goals (2000)*. Further, the outcomes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 (also Earth Summit 2012 or Rio +20) which will be held in Rio de Janeiro will give input to future global agendas. This conference will have two main themes: the green economy (in relation to sustainable development and poverty eradication) and the necessary institutional framework for sustainable development[3]. The Habitat Agenda is a specific urban framework but the Millennium Development Goals and (to date) the Rio +20 conference has much more generic focus.

[4] The SIDS have produced de Barbados Plan of Action (BPOA) in 1994 and the Mauritius Strategy for the Implementation of the BPOA (MSI) which was signed in 2005 and reviewed in 2010.

the currently executed *Participatory Slum Upgrading Program (PSUP)* have been implemented in cities all over the world, including in the Caribbean.[5]

4. The Caribbean Agenda

As mentioned above, in past years a series of urban development programmes have been implemented in the region largely based on global urban agendas and usually initiated by UN-Habitat and the World Bank. They often leave room for local adaptation based on needs and capabilities. Generally, emphasis is placed on urban governance, land security, basic urban services, environment, HIV/AIDS, slum reduction and development of adequate shelter, disaster management, inclusive and safer cities and to some extent, gender. However, governments tend to focus on the physical aspects of the urban areas rather than the social and economic conditions within them.

4.1. Defining the Caribbean Urban Agenda

The local Caribbean policies and practices on urban issues have been influenced by the global agenda.

Based on an examination of the various urban programmes and policies introduced by international development partners (IDPs), **Table 3** showcases the urban priority themes in Caribbean projects and programmes.

TABLE 3: CARIBBEAN URBAN PRIORITIES						
	CARICOM	**UMP (PoS)**	**Safer Cities programme**	**LA21/SCP**	**Localizing MDG**	**PSUP**
Safety and Security	Disaster preparedness, Crime		Crime, Safety, Violence		Crime	
Poverty & Deprivation		HIV/AIDS and poverty			Employment	
Physical Living Conditions		SWM		SWM, Public Space, Transport	Access to drainage	Basic services Land
Inequality		AIDS HIV and Youth	Women and violence		Youth, Gender Education, HIV/AIDS	Gender/HIV/ inclusive city
Climate Change (*contribution to***)**	Green economy, Energy			River degradation		
Climate Change (*vulnerability to***)**	Disaster preparedness					Disaster Preparedness
Governance		Participatory Governance	Citizen's Participation			Urban Governance
Sustainable planning						
Local Economic Development	Liberalization CSME					

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[5] For example, see UMP Website: www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=374, Local Agenda 21 Website: http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=540, for more information on these programmes.

4.1.1. CARICOM's Policy Framework

An analysis of CARICOM documents and reports shows that CARICOM does not have a specific focus on urban settlements or urban issues. None of its policy councils have a specific urban focus or includes human settlements on agenda.[6] The issues prioritized by CARICOM are the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), climate change, renewable energy, HIV/AIDS, disaster preparedness, gender in(equality), safety and crime, food security, and economic vulnerability. These are some of the very issues that are urban-relevant or urban-specific.[7] CARICOM has also been involved in the implementation and adaptation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are relevant to the Caribbean context and have implications for the urban agenda.

5. Critical Urban Issues for the Region

The Caribbean sub region can be viewed as a group of small island developing states characterised by small open economies that are heavily reliant on one economic sector for foreign exchange earnings, employment and government revenue. They vary in size, resource endowment, language, ethnic composition, culture and economic structure. According to the World Bank, over half of the countries in the Caribbean sub-region are classified as higher-income countries. However, with a few exceptions, countries in the sub-region are also among the world`s most heavily indebted. Further, all UN Member countries in the sub-region are ranked high-to-medium on the human development index (HDI). Their relatively advanced position in terms of GDP per capita and the HDI does not mean that poverty, inequalities and social exclusion do not exist in the Caribbean. These countries are also contending with escalating rates of crime and violence and high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Although the region is experiencing an epidemiological transition as typical diseases and conditions associated with developing countries have been largely eliminated, there has been an upsurge in chronic non-communicable diseases. Compulsory education in most countries is from 5 to 16 years and most countries in the region have achieved universal primary education. Generally, most capital cities in the insular Caribbean are coastal cities. This makes them increasingly vulnerable to environmental concerns such as rising sea level. Further, the Caribbean is located in a volcanic region, earthquake belt and hurricane zone. This has the potential to exacerbate volatility and vulnerability though large-scale loss

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[6] Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED), Council for Finance and Planning (COFAP), Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR), Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD), Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE).
[7] See for example http://www.caricom.org/jsp/communications/communiques/31hgc_2010_communique.jsp and http://www.caricom.org/jsp/communications/communiques/communiques_index_2001-.jsp?menu=communications..

of property and human life and effect a negative economic growth given the region's dependence on agriculture, tourism and manufacturing for foreign exchange earnings.

The above-mentioned issues have direct and indirect impacts upon the development of local communities. Based upon this and the expected population growth in urban areas (see Table 1), it is imperative that the region devises a strategy to respond to the likely population explosion in capital cities. Such a strategy would address the attendant challenges that are expected to arise and leverage resources for a potential growth area. The global urban agenda and the projects by the IDPs afforded the base for the development of a typology of issues critical for region. These include broad thematic areas such as *natural hazards and climate change; physical living conditions of residents of poor communities (water, sanitation and waste disposal); safety and security (crime and violence, tenure security, economic stresses and shocks); poverty, deprivation and inequality;* and *governance and sustainable planning.*

6. The Caribbean Urban Agenda

The application of the global urban agenda to the Caribbean, driven by the 1996 UN Habitat agenda and the 2000 MDGs, is a useful starting point. The issues identified in **Table 2** and **Table 3** as well as the conditions within the region converge to inform the development of a Caribbean-specific urban agenda. The very concept of a regional urban policy suggests that there are enough commonalities in the urban areas of the region to warrant a regional policy.

The Caribbean Urban Forum held in April 2011 in Guyana **noted** that urban settlements are only represented in limited matters on the Caribbean agenda and that the specificity of policy makers is often missing. As such, benefits can be derived from the sharing of knowledge and solutions with respect to urban challenges and opportunities. The Meeting also made some technical and operational recommendations to inform the development of a Caribbean Urban Agenda. The **recommendations** are:

- training, education and communication should form an integral part of forwarding the Caribbean Urban Agenda;
- agenda should be holistic, multi-sectoral and continuously reviewed and adapted in partnership with policy makers, academia, urban practitioners and civil society;

- agenda should be theme driven and defined by higher and lower priorities (**Table 4 below**)[8];

- development of a Caribbean Professional Planners Association. A Task Force comprising of academia (UWI), an inter-governmental organisation (CARICOM), civil society has been formed for the express purpose of developing the terms of reference for the Association;

- development of an action oriented research agenda (i.e. what research needs to be done to achieve the broad priorities established by the Caribbean urban agenda); and

- adaptation of urban profiling tools and other relevant methodologies unique to the Caribbean with emphasis placed on localization of available data, rationalization data gathering and management, data accuracy and determining appropriate spatial boundaries.[9]

TABLE 4: PRIORITIES FOR A CARIBBEAN URBAN AGENDA		
PRIORITY	Thematic Areas	Issue
HIGH	Local economic development and Poverty alleviation	unemployment strengthening diversified local opportunities for economic development provision of housing and basic services
	Enabling mechanisms for government and professionals	research, communications, training, education, financing etc.
	Governance	implementation, communication and legislation, municipal governance, awareness component, co-governance inclusive governance, partnerships, coordination
	Informal sector	tenure security, informal settlements, informal economy
	Natural hazards and disaster management	climate change, built environment resilience, response capacity
	Physical human Security	crime safety freedom from fear
LOW	Physical Living Conditions	housing, basic services (water, sanitation, energy use, transportation etc.)
	Inequality	social, economic inequality based on gender, age
	Climate Change	*contribution to:* energy, emission, transportation, green economy
		*vulnerability to***:** LECZ, Adaptation at local community level,
	Sustainable planning	urban form (compact), holistic, Comprehensive Coastal zone settlements planning , land management/use, rural/urban integrated planning

7. The Role of the Professional Community in Advancing Urban Development and the Green Economy

A working group on regional professional collaboration in planning is actively moving towards the establishment of a Caribbean Professional Planning Association. The regional body will be launched in

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[8] Some of these issues were set out in the draft policy working paper by *Verrest H, Mohammed A, Moorcroft S. Towards a Caribbean Urban Agenda. The Caribbean Network for Urban and Land Management*.

[9] Some of these issues have been iterated in set out in the draft technical working paper: *Mohammed A, Howard D. Strengthening the development and application of urban profiling methodologies: a review of urban profiling in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Network for Land and Urban Management.*

March 2012, in conjunction with the Caribbean Urban Forum 2012.[10] The regional association will serve as a non-governmental, membership-based civil society organization, made up of individual professionals. The regional body will be built on a foundation of existing national associations of planning, which currently exist in Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados, and being established in Guyana.

The governance structure should enable an independent body to support, promote and advance good planning practice throughout the Caribbean region and enhance recognition of the Planning Profession throughout the Caribbean region, including recognition of planning by various national governments.

There are four potential areas for collaboration between CARICOM and a regional association of planners:

- Advice on establishing a body that operates both nationally and regionally
- Enabling mobility of labour across the Caribbean
- Enabling licensing/registration of professional planners
- Offering a forum for contributing to the Policy Dialogue on urban development and the Green Economy

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[10] Membership in the working group includes representatives of the Barbados Town and Country Planning Society, Jamaica Institute of Planners, Trinidad and Tobago Society of Planners, University of the West Indies, Caribbean Network for Land & Urban Management, University of Technology, Jamaica, University of Guyana, Anton de Kom University, Suriname, Commonwealth Association of Planners, Canadian Institute of Planners, Atlantic Planners Institute and the American Planning Association.