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Caribbean Youth Position on the Green Economy in preparation for Rio+20

We the young people of the Caribbean, participating in the Caribbean Youth Environment Network's broad-based consultative preparatory process leading up to Rio+20, are of the considered opinion that the political directorates of the Caribbean region need to continue to work towards their current goal of achieving a state of sustainable development.

However, it is our conviction that there is need to re-double efforts to vigorously pursue strategies that support the sustainable use of the region's natural resources; to safeguard their quality and availability for the use of all future generations.

We recognise that the key to the conservation of the natural resources base of the Caribbean lies in our ability to utilise these resources in a manner that they redound to the benefit of the livelihoods of our current citizens and the development of national Caribbean economies.

However, as the group of citizens that will inherit the Caribbean, we wish to impress to our governments that they need not wait for global directives or a global meeting to commit to the strategy of a green economy. We therefore call upon our governments to pledge to take action now and let these actions demonstrate the seriousness of their resolve.

Youth of the Caribbean support in principle, the working definition of Green Economy put forward by the Government of Barbados (February 2010) which states: "An integrated production, distribution, consumption and waste assimilation system that, at its core, reflects the fragility of our small island ecosystems as the basis for natural resource protection policy intervention, business and investment choice, human development programming, and, the facilitation of export market development strategies."

We ask that the governments, industries and business people of our region establish synergies and invest in the transition to a Green Economy. This will promote more environmentally friendly lifestyles in order to:

- attain the goal of sustainable development;
- strengthen cooperation among communities; and
- restore a balance with nature, (including all ecosystems, both land and marine)

This is especially relevant to the Small Island Development States (SIDS) which make up most of the Caribbean as these are particularly vulnerable to climate change and natural catastrophes. However, as young citizens we recognise that there is also a very critical role to be played by the consuming public, as their purchasing and consumer choices and patterns heavily influence energy use and waste generation.

We therefore call upon the leaders of our nations who will represent us at Rio+20, to commit to agreements that develop solid actions to establish mechanisms and policies which will ensure the transition towards a low-carbon economy, that is efficient in the use of resources and socially inclusive.

For these reasons, we appeal to governments to pay particular attention to the areas of:

Climate change

The prevailing science indicates that the Caribbean will not be able to avoid the impacts of global climate change. We see this situation as one which could derail or hamper the Green Economy process. Given our region's vulnerability to climate change, we emphasise that it is urgent to build in mitigative and adaptive strategies within this green economic approach while ensuring that a focus on respect for nature and the eradication of poverty is kept in mind. As such, we call on our Caribbean governments to rapidly implement climate change adaptation programmes, and where these have been started, seek to accelerate implementation. Further, we strongly encourage the development of information and education programmes on climate change for the health, agriculture, manufacturing and fisheries sectors in order to assist in the enablement of their various contingency planning processes. Finally, we are of the considered opinion that it is critical for Caribbean governments to continue to lobby at the international level for reductions in the global emissions of carbon.

Education

We implore that environmental education be made a part of the curriculum at all levels of education. We consider that it is necessary to train citizens about environmental issues in a more universal manner.

In addition, we urge all government agencies to assist civil society in creating an enabling environment to develop environmental education programmes for the communities, especially promoting the participation of children and youth. These programmes should seek to encourage youth to make sustainable choices in their daily life.

Energy

Energy is vital to the economic and social development of the region. However, we also recognise that our current fossil fuel based energy systems are economically and ecologically unsustainable. We therefore call on governments of the Caribbean to immediately develop and implement policies that will

lead to alternative and innovative non-polluting sources of energy, inclusive of waste to energy power facilities. We demand that all industries seek to utilise alternative energies and to seek to generate opportunities for decent work for young people. Our expectation is that alternative forms of energy should account for at least 60% of the region's energy needs by 2022.

Water resources

Water is critical for all life and access to it is a basic human right. Young people of the Caribbean therefore believe that it is incumbent on the governments of this region to ensure that there is an adequate potable water supply for all. In this regard, we call for increased support for integrated water resources management systems and for enforceable restrictions to most forms anthropogenic development within our watersheds. Further, we call for the immediate development of sewerage systems in cities and areas of dense human settlement, which will allow for water to be either recharged to aquifers or be made available for agriculture or other suitable uses. As young citizens of the Caribbean, we are also concerned that the energy cost associated with the distribution of water is excessive and needs to be re-examined. Alternative sources of energy need to be investigated with some haste.

Finally, we want to state that we fully enjoy and appreciate the natural beauty of ecosystems that abound throughout the Caribbean. It is these same ecosystems that support in the main, the tourism industry that we are so dependent upon. Moreover, we fear is that often in our drive for development, we forget that ecosystems require water for natural maintenance and survival. We therefore call on the governments of the Caribbean to implement policies that will embrace the role of water for nature and for the provision of ecosystem services.

Space for ecosystem health

Improving standards of living and the adoption of more affluent tastes has led to more Caribbean citizens constructing homes higher on hillsides, which has caused encroachment into forested locations as well as watersheds. Beyond this, more and more developments for housing and other purposes are utilising the very limited land space available on islands. We, the youth of the Caribbean are of the opinion that if this trend continues unabated, the shrinking areas that remain in natural vegetation will be incapable of maintaining the level of biological diversity that has become synonymous with life in the Caribbean and is likely to negatively impact our heritage and culture that we have fostered for so many generations. We therefore appeal to governments to adopt policies that allow for the conservation of more natural spaces.

Mitigating pollution levels of industry

All industries are polluters, as well as consumers of natural resources and energy. In order to achieve a state of sustainable development, youth of the Caribbean believe that our governments must put stringent policies in place, coupled with adequate facilities for conducting effective monitoring and surveillance of industries. This should assist in ensuring that waste by-products are controlled and mitigated in order to produce minimal damage to the environment. We propose that our governments actively engage in seeking mechanisms of compensation in proportion to the environmental damage caused by industrial production. Further, we feel that enabling policies and conditions must be put in place to encourage industries to use less water and less energy. This notwithstanding, we believe it is paramount that every consideration is established to ensure the protection of worker's health from environmental hazards frequently found in the closed systems of industrial facilities.

Transport

In the Caribbean, the transport sector is a major consumer of fossil fuels. We believe that this sector needs to receive urgent attention where clear strategies are elucidated and will lead to the exploration and the usage of more energy efficient motor transport units and types of mass transport.

Agriculture and Fisheries in the context of food security and sovereignty

As young citizens, while we fully appreciate the concepts of productivity and maximization of yields, we also appreciate the concept of the carrying capacity of soils, rivers and oceans. In this regard, while we would like to see an increase in areas under agricultural production, we also believe that there is need for governments to support sustainable land management practices to its fullest extent. In this regard, we call on our governments to encourage farmers to embrace the best practices found within traditional agricultural methods. Beyond this, we call on governments to develop systems that will divert organic matter from national municipal waste for use in the manufacture of compost for fertilization and reconditioning of soils.

The fisheries sector makes an important contribution to the economies of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries, mainly through the supply of protein in the food supply; an employment source; an income generator and a foreign currency earner. Fish stocks need to be sustainably harvested for the benefit of the citizens of the Caribbean, and every effort must be made to control the over extraction that occurs via local efforts and uncontrolled extraction by non-Caribbean fishers.

Beyond these matters it is vital that more robust efforts must be made to promote a greater appreciation of local Caribbean foods over non-Caribbean imports.

Waste management

As young citizens of the Caribbean, we recognise the economic benefits that can be derived from the recycling of waste, as well as the benefits that can be derived from the conversion of waste to energy systems. In this regard, we call on the governments of the Caribbean to assiduously work towards facilitating the development of waste as a major national energy resource. We also call for the elimination of the use of plastics for casual or occasional packaging or wrapping. The uncontrolled use and indiscriminate disposal of plastics continues to be a terrestrial and marine ecological hazard. Plastics have also been identified as a major factor in the blockage of drains and the subsequent flooding that occurs during periods of intense rainfall.

Disaster management

The Caribbean region is one which is prone to natural disasters. It lies within the hurricane belt and has active volcanic as well as seismic activity. These all pose tremendous threats to the citizenry and natural ecology of the region. At times poor planning, design and practices have created environments that have led to unnecessary disaster hazard zones. It is critical to recognise that one major hazard event can lead to economic devastation of an island state. With this in mind, we call on the governments of the Caribbean to implement strategies that will lead to the protection of gains that will be made with the Green Economy.

Our Commitment

Regarding the afore-mentioned, we the Caribbean youth seek meaningful consideration to our request for consultation and involvement in the Rio+20 process. We feel that as future stewards of the heritage and patrimony of the Caribbean region, we should be allowed to contribute towards the development of policy, as we have a sense of ownership and responsibility to our families, communities, respective nations and the Caribbean as a whole.

We pledge to work towards changing the mindset and behavior of the youth sector through encouraging them to adopt sustainable consumption practices. However, we cannot expect to be successful in this regard, unless governments are supportive and create an enabling environment that will allow such a strategy to flourish. We therefore call for appropriate allocation of resources and investment in the formal, non-formal and informal education sectors; inclusive of suitable and relevant technical training that support knowledge and promote all citizens to action on the Green Economy.

For the negotiations leading up to Rio+20 in June 2012, we the young people of the Caribbean ask that our opinions and positions be reflected in the Caribbean's official position.

This document has been prepared with input and contributions from youth representatives from: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Cursorsy consultation on the document was also held with the Caribbean Policy Development Centre.