Chapter 7
The Caribbean Community: A Promise yet Unfulfilled

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), a cluster of 15 countries and islands in the Caribbean region that invest ongoing efforts to establish growth and increased well-being. CARICOM is facing its share of challenges, of which two important ones include a) economic relations and b) education. With their common history as former European colonies, the Caribbean nations have traditionally focused on the USA, Canada, and Europe as their main partners. Now that the global tide is turning, it becomes increasingly important for them to change course. China, as the major global player of our times, is therefore a potential partner that Caribbean nations increasingly embrace. Even so, the challenges of their small scale and their lack of trade complementarity remain dark clouds on the Caribbean horizon. In addition, the education system in many of the member nations needs urgent and radical reinvention. This chapter shines some light on these issues.

THE CARIBBEAN

Lusciously nestled in the equatorial west where the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean inter-sperse, and where the sun shines year round, lies a cluster of predominantly small nations commonly known as the Caribbean. There are many connotations to this name, depending on whether one perceives it from a geographical, political, historical, or cultural viewpoint. Caribbean nations have a number of important factors in common: they were all subject to European colonization and the majority of them, with the exception of Haiti, gained their independence less than half a century ago. Given their colonization history, these nations also share a history of slavery, and a cultural blend with African, Indian, and European influences. Aside from the language of their former colonizers which they maintained as their formal or official language, these nations further share the common trait of having developed their own creole languages.

There is much information to share about this fertile place on earth. The Caribbean islands are known for their beautiful beaches, and therefore serve as a great vacation destination for people

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from everywhere on the globe. As such, many of the nations in this region are heavily dependent on the tourist industry. The Caribbean is further well-known for its entertainment: dazzling carnivals and wonderful reggae and calypso music, made world famous by artists such as Bob Marley and the Mighty Sparrow. The Caribbean nations such as Suriname and Guyana which lack the famous sandy beaches of other countries in the region are increasingly gaining global interest due to their rich interior with tribal Maroon and Amerindian villages, broad rivers, and dense Amazon forest, presenting marvelous eco-tourism opportunities to the adventurous traveler.

However, this chapter will not discuss the tourist industry or the beauty the Caribbean has to offer. Rather, it will focus on the collective performance of a cluster of Caribbean nations, formally known as the Caribbean Community and Common Market, or CARICOM. The reason for doing so is because the CARICOM can be considered a solid representation of the common efforts of the Caribbean nations to earn a more essential presence in the global trade arena, by making collective progress in the most efficient way.

THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

CARICOM did not emerge in a sudden bloom. It was a growth process that began in the late 1950s when the British West Indies Federation was established. As the Federation ended in 1962, local political leaders understood the need to strengthen cooperation within the region, particularly given the emerging tendency of gaining independence from former colonizers. It was the government of Trinidad and Tobago that first proposed the idea of a Caribbean Community, not only consisting of Caribbean islands, but also of the three “Guianas” as well as the islands of the Caribbean Sea. Dialogues started in 1963, and in 1965, the leaders agreed upon the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) which was formalized in 1968. Member nations at the time included Antigua, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana, soon to be joined by Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts/Nevis/Anguilla, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Jamaica, and Montserrat. Belize joined in 1971. A year later, the regional leaders transformed CARIFTA into a Common Market, thus establishing the Caribbean Community with the Common Market at its core.

CARICOM was established by the Treaty of Chaguaramas on August 1, 1973, first signed by four members, and soon thereafter joined by eight more. In 1983, the Bahamas joined the CARICOM, and in 1995 Suriname became the 14th member and the first Dutch-speaking State to join. Finally, in 2002, Haiti became the 15th member and the first French-speaking Caribbean State to become a full Member of CARICOM (History of the Caribbean Community, 2011).

With its 15 member states, one would expect the Caribbean Community to already play a significant role in the business landscape of South-America and among the various Trade Unions in the two Americas. However, to date this has only moderately been the case. CARICOM’s current full-member states include: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Most of the CARICOM members are islands. The only two land-based nations in the community are Guyana and Suriname, both located on the northeast coast of South America. Table 1 below provides a preliminary overview of the CARICOM member states.

To highlight the CARICOM’s performance in general, the remainder of this chapter will focus on two main performance parameters: internal and external economic relations, and education as an underlying factor of development.
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