

# **A VIRGIN ISLANDS' PERSPECTIVE OF THE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the Virgin Islands' perspective of the recent trade negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The EPAs are free trade agreements between the European Commission of the European Union (EU) and the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. The Virgin Islands (BVI) remains only an associate member of the Community (CARICOM) and not of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). Overall, the study concluded that as the EPA negotiations progressed, further divisions formed within the Caribbean Community leaving into question, "How will the EPA and the relations among Caribbean leaders now affect plans for the transformation of CARICOM into a single economy, as envisaged for 2015?" In the same vein, there is the belief in the BVI that the EPA may have deserved another review, as was recommended by representatives of civil society. However, with the agreement already in place, the region should now try to capitalize on the benefits that can be brought forth from it. It is also recommended that other opportunities for trade and economic development in an effort to address the EPA's shortcomings be sought. To this end, it would be advantageous to consider on a more serious note, the development of a comprehensive regional market for the trading of goods and services, that is, the CSME. The paper used the qualitative research method to substantiate its findings.

**Key Words: Caribbean, CARICOM, CRNM, CSME, EPA, Qualitative Research Method**

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## **Introduction**

Caribbean governments are depending heavily on the success of international trade and economic development agreements, to eradicate poverty and to attain sustainable development within their jurisdictions. To date, many of the negotiation processes for these agreements have resulted in much political and economic division within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). These divisions have not only produced many missed opportunities to increase trade and economic development for the region, but have also restricted CARICOM's ability to advance its agenda on the global stage. Even though the Virgin Islands (BVI) remains only an associate member of CARICOM and not of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), it still has an interest in the progress of the regional grouping and its trade and economic development initiatives. This is despite the general belief that the Government of the Virgin Islands has no interest in the CSME. In order for the Caribbean to see improvements in future trade negotiation processes, a review of its past negotiating hurdles must be undertaken and addressed.

The purpose of this research was to examine the BVI's perspective of the recent trade negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The EPA is the most recent example of divisions emerging from a trade or economic development negotiation process and will be the point of emphasis for this study. The concern of 'two Caribbeans' emerging was already raised by a Caribbean analyst because of the widespread debate prior to the signing of the agreement. Setting aside the character assassination, suggestions that Caribbean Heads had agreed to a flawed document, letters questioning the role of senior figures and damaging inter-institutional rivalry, what remains clear is that a more fundamental philosophical divide has emerged in the context of the EPA over the direction in which the region and its integration process are headed <sup>[1]</sup>. Furthermore, almost one week after CARICOM signed the EPA with

Europe, there was a call for regional solidarity in the trade negotiations from the chair of the Pacific group of trade ministers of the wider African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group <sup>[2]</sup>. In that respect, the region must now try to capitalize on the benefits that the EPA agreement can bring forth while at the seeking opportunities for trade and economic development to address the EPA's shortcomings. The qualitative research method was applied in this study to substantiate these findings.

Qualitative research approaches utilize constructivist or advocacy or participatory knowledge claims that possess phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case studies and narratives <sup>[3]</sup>. In general, face-to-face interviews are a popular primary data collection methodology and interviews are quite useful when participants cannot be observed directly and allow participants to provide historical information <sup>[3]</sup>. Precisely, interviews can comprise either of closed-ended or open-ended questions.

The controversy surrounding qualitative research methods is that the researcher positions him or herself to collect participant meanings with regard to the study, but may at the same time bring personal values into the study. However, face-to-face interviews involving open-ended questions permit an unlimited number of possible answers, where respondents can answer in detail, they can qualify and clarify responses, and unanticipated findings can be discovered <sup>[4]</sup>.

The present study has dual significance. First, by reviewing past negotiating hurdles, future problems within trade negotiation processes could be brought to light and addressed. Second, an analysis conducted on CARICOM's negotiating opportunities could identify more trade and economic development prospects across the region.

To the best of my knowledge, this is not the first attempt to address CARICOM's negotiating challenges at the regional level, but may be the first to give a BVI perspective. Many

other Caribbean authors, commentators, journalists and academics have debated past situations arising out of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA<sup>i</sup>), Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA<sup>ii</sup>) and EPA agreements. One writer, in particular, made known how fierce disagreements and divisions emerged within CARICOM over the recently-concluded negotiations for an EPA with the European Union (EU) <sup>[6]</sup>. In his contribution, the writer exposed how the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM<sup>iii</sup>), was compelled to go on the offensive against EPA critics by releasing to the media and on its website a "fact vs fiction" statement, which was a summary of the negotiating processes and involvement of stakeholders, as well as roles played by named regional officials and experts <sup>[6]</sup>. The article also showed how the CRNM left no doubt about its disagreements with those claiming lack of involvement of regional stakeholders in the extended consultation initiatives.

The paper is organized as follows. Section two introduces the CARICOM, CRNM and the EPA. Section three develops the research methodology. Section four contains the research findings. Section five provides the conclusion.

### **CARICOM, the CRNM and the EPA**

The establishment of CARICOM occurred at the Seventh Heads of Government Conference in November 1972 and the decision to establish the CARICOM materialized at the

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<sup>i</sup> NAFTA means North American Free Trade Agreement and is a trilateral trade bloc in North America created by the governments of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The agreement creating the trade block came into force on January 1, 1994 <sup>[5]</sup>.

<sup>ii</sup> FTAA means Free Trade Agreements of the Americas and was a proposed agreement to eliminate or reduce the trade barriers among all countries in the Americas but Cuba <sup>[5]</sup>.

<sup>iii</sup> The Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) was created by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Governments to develop, coordinate and execute an overall negotiating strategy for various external trade negotiations in which the Region is involved <sup>[7]</sup>.

Eight Heads of Government Conference of CARIFTA<sup>iv</sup> held in April 1973 in Georgetown, Guyana<sup>[8]</sup>. To this end, the Georgetown Accord<sup>v</sup> outlines the process through which CARICOM was established. By May 1, 1974 all other members of CARIFTA had signed the Agreement to become full members of CARICOM, except Antigua and Barbuda and St. Kitts and Nevis; who both signed later in July 1974<sup>[8]</sup>. The three objectives of the Community at its inception were economic integration, co-ordination of foreign policy, and functional co-operation in areas such as health, education and culture, and other areas related to human and social development<sup>[8]</sup>.

The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas of 2001 identifies many regional institutions<sup>vi</sup> under CARICOM's command<sup>[9]</sup>. The Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) was one of these institutions and was formed in April 1997 to develop, coordinate and execute an overall negotiating strategy for various external negotiations in which the region was involved.

The discussion among Caribbean leaders about creating such an organization began in the mid 1980's when it was acknowledged that external trade negotiations were going to be extremely important in helping the region adjust to the challenges of the global environment<sup>[7]</sup>. Moreover, it was presumed that external trade negotiations would be best approached in a coordinated, managed and systematic way to avoid inefficient and ineffective usage of resources,

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<sup>iv</sup> In October 1967, CARIFTA was formally agreed upon, at the Fourth Heads of Government Conference held in Bridgetown, Barbados and was the free trade agreement that existed before CARICOM<sup>[8]</sup>.

<sup>v</sup> Original signatories to the Treaty were Prime Ministers Errol Barrow for Barbados; Forbes Burnham for Guyana; Michael Manley for Jamaica; Eric Williams for Trinidad and Tobago<sup>[8]</sup>.

<sup>vi</sup> The institutions recognized by the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas are: Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians (ACCP); Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA); Caribbean Meteorological Institute (CMI); Caribbean Meteorological Organization (CMO); Caribbean Environmental Health Institute (CEHI); Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI); Caribbean Centre for Developmental Administration (CARICAD); and the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI)<sup>[8]</sup>. The Caribbean Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) are examples of institutions established by the Community subsequent to the ratification of the Revised Treaty<sup>[8]</sup>. Associate Institutions of the Community are the Caribbean Development bank (CDB), the University of Guyana (UG), the University of the West Indies (UWI), the Caribbean Law Institute and its Centre (CLIC) and the Secretariat of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)<sup>[8]</sup>. Among the key partners in the integration process are the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), the Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce (CAIC) and the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC)<sup>[8]</sup>.

while at the same time, enabling the Caribbean to take advantage of development opportunities in areas where the Caribbean may have potential competitive edge <sup>[7]</sup>.

CRNM's mission is to help Member States maximize the benefits of participating in global trade negotiations by (a) providing sound advice, (b) facilitating the generation of national positions, (c) coordinating the formulation of a cohesive negotiating strategy and (d) leading negotiations where appropriate <sup>[7]</sup>. The CRNM also represents the trade interests of the Dominican Republic, and Cuba in specific negotiating arenas<sup>vii</sup>.

Research on CRNM shows that the organization engages in negotiations at four general levels, namely: (1) the Multilateral Level, which includes negotiations within the World Trade Organization (WTO); (2) the Inter-regional Level, which included the negotiations of the EPA with the European Union; (3) the Hemispheric Level, which included the negotiations of the FTAA, but these negotiations have been dormant since 2003 and (4) the Bilateral Level, which includes the negotiating of agreements between CARICOM and other countries such as Canada, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic <sup>[7]</sup>. It is CRNM's intention that at all levels of negotiations, Trade and Foreign Ministers, their professional staff in Member State capitals, and their Representatives in centers such as Brussels and Geneva, will play, and continue to play, essential roles in the negotiating process. In the same vein, CRNM is involved intimately in integrating these efforts in order to arrive at common regional negotiating positions <sup>[7]</sup>.

At present, there are two offices for the CRNM's operations, namely: (a) the Jamaica office, which serves as headquarters of the CRNM and (b) the Barbados office, which houses the

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<sup>vii</sup> CARICOM Member States along with Cuba and the Dominican Republic are collectively known as CARIFORUM, which is an acronym for the Caribbean Forum of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP). The ACP was established to coordinate cooperation between its members and the European Union through the negotiation and implementation of cooperation agreements with the European Community as a group <sup>[8]</sup>.

CRNM sub-office <sup>[7]</sup>. The CRNM also maintains a presence in Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Brussels and Geneva.

As mentioned above, the CRNM has come under much criticism following the conclusion of the EPA negotiation process. Regarding the future of CRNM, it was recently reported that this division would be scrapped and integrated into the operations of the CARICOM Secretariat in Guyana. This decision was confirmed at the Fifth Summit of the Americas<sup>viii</sup> meeting in 2009.

To repeat, the most recent negotiating assignment for the CRNM was the EPA. To be more specific, the EPAs are a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the European Commission of the EU and the Group of ACP countries. To date, there is much criticism over how the EPA was handled at the negotiating level, suggesting that the non-reciprocal and discriminating preferential trade agreements offered by the EU are incompatible with WTO rules. It is also important to note that the EPAs are a key element of the Cotonou Agreement, the latest agreement in the history of ACP-EU Development Cooperation.

Naturally, this new regional grouping established due to the EPA scheme causes the problem of how to reconcile this approach with the previous special treatment of the group of least developed countries (LDCs) among the ACP countries. In fact, 39 of the 77 ACP countries are defined as LDCs by the United Nations.

Traditionally, the LDCs constitute a special group among the developing countries and have usually been treated separately. Nevertheless, the EPAs will provide special arrangements for this particular group and, as opposed to the other ACP countries, the group of LDCs will be

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<sup>viii</sup> The Fifth Summit of the Americas was held from April 17 – 19, 2009 in Trinidad and Tobago.

invited to reject the EPAs and continue trade relations under the "Everything But Arms" (EBA<sup>ix</sup>) regulation.

In short, the EPA did not have to be accepted in the format that it was by CARICOM and could have been rejected and renegotiated, as proposed by Guyana. Regrettably, Guyana was left to stand alone in favor of signing a partial (goods only) EPA with the EU, instead of the complete negotiated text. More specifically, the President of Guyana<sup>x</sup> claimed it was an accord that has some good features but also some horrendous provisions<sup>[10]</sup>. Not surprisingly, his arguments were turned down by the Prime Ministers of Jamaica<sup>xi</sup> and Barbados<sup>xii</sup>, who both contended that this was "the best deal" the region could have secured<sup>[10]</sup>.

The Jamaican Prime Minister, who at the time was the chairman of CARICOM's Prime Ministerial Subcommittee on External Trade Negotiations, noted that over its 36 years of existence, the Community has been resilient in overcoming internal political and economic problems and he was "confident" that efforts would be made to avoid any rupture that could prove detrimental to the achievement of shared objectives<sup>[10]</sup>. On the other hand, the Guyanese President said he respected the right of his Caribbean colleagues to sign off, unconditionally, for the full EPA although he thinks this is a wrong approach<sup>[10]</sup>.

Accordingly, the result emerging out of the 2008 CARICOM summit in Barbados was that 13 CARICOM countries would sign unconditionally the text of the EPA as initialed in December, 2007 by representatives of the EU and the CRNM; the signing of which took place in

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<sup>ix</sup> Launched in 2001 by the Council of Ministers, this amendment to the Generalized System of Preferences has ever since regulated the trade relations between the EU and the LDCs, granting duty-free access to all products from LDCs without any quantitative restrictions – except to arms and munitions. While this provision facilitates the situation of the LDCs under the new trade scheme, it has also been criticized that the EBA initiative prevents LDCs to open up their markets for EU products within the context of an EPA<sup>[10]</sup>.

<sup>x</sup> The President of Guyana is Bharrat Jagdeo and has held that position since August 11, 1999.

<sup>xi</sup> Prime Minister Bruce Golding became Jamaica's eighth Prime Minister on September 11, 2007.

<sup>xii</sup> David John Howard Thompson has been the Prime Minister of Barbados since January 2008.



mid-October, 2008 <sup>[10]</sup>. As it relates to Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica and St Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and the Dominican Republic, there was really never any doubt about their anxieties to sign off on the EPA text. Added support came from Grenada, St Lucia, the Bahamas and Belize, at the Summit in Barbados <sup>[10]</sup>.

Not surprisingly, no government of CARICOM, except Guyana, opted to engage any section of civil society to benefit from their criticisms/reservations, even if they disagreed with their positions. Instead, calls by civil society representatives for dialogue were contemporarily ignored; among them being the likes of Shridath Ramphal, Norman Girvan, Havelock Brewster, Clive Thomas and Vaughn Lewis <sup>[10]</sup>.

Now with the EPA having been signed, the CARICOM Secretariat has moved to ensure urgent implementation of the EPA signed with the European Community (EC). In keeping with the directive of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community, the Secretariat has established a Unit to coordinate the implementation of the Agreement which was signed in October 2008 by the Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (CARIFORUM) and the EC <sup>[11]</sup>. This provisional application of the EPA became effective on December 29, 2008<sup>[11]</sup>.

To this end, the Implementation Unit will provide in-country hands-on assistance and model legislation to give effect to some of the obligations <sup>[11]</sup>. It is the Secretariat's intention to report to the Organs of the Community on the establishment of the Implementation Unit at meetings scheduled in the next fortnight.

In addition, the CRNM is advising CARIFORUM firms to become more proactive in extracting the benefits from the EPA <sup>[12]</sup>. Other words of encouragement have come from the

CEO of Barbados Private Sector Trade Team, Magnus Whitehead, who urged Barbadian firms to look at the possibility of exporting to French territories in the Caribbean under the EPA <sup>[13]</sup>. Despite these developments, the question still remains, “How will the EPA and the relations among Caribbean leaders now affect plans for the transformation of CARICOM into a single economy, as envisaged for 2015?”

### **Qualitative Research Methodology**

Qualitative research methods primarily focus on a single phenomenon, while at the same time, studying the context or setting of participants and validating the accuracy of its findings. To recall, qualitative research approaches utilize constructivist or advocacy or participatory knowledge claims that possess phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case studies and narratives <sup>[3]</sup>.

The usual steps of social qualitative research were undertaken in this paper. First, the objects of the study, CARICOM, CRNM AND EPA, were identified and described: (a) CARICOM is a regional institution that proposes economic integration, coordinates foreign policy and provides functional cooperation for its member and associate member states; (b) the CRNM, an institution of CARICOM, is responsible for developing and maintaining a cohesive and effective framework for the coordination and management of the Caribbean Region’s negotiating resources and expertise and (c) the EPAs are a FTA between the European Commission of the EU and the Group of ACP countries.

Second, the sampling size and procedures for interviews were determined and the types of respondents were identified. In this research, open-ended questions were preferred, as they

permit an unlimited number of possible answers, allow respondents to answer in detail, allow persons to qualify and clarify responses, and allow unanticipated findings to be discovered. Given the nature of the topic, it was felt that the better methodology to apply would be the qualitative research method, which consists mainly of interviews. Furthermore, because the topic is not familiar with the average person residing in the BVI, it was felt that interviews would be more suitable if administered to political figures representing the differing interests. As a result, two persons were randomly selected; one from the current group of elected representatives and another from the civil society. The first interviewee was the Legislative representative for the Seventh District of the Virgin Islands House of Assembly<sup>xiii</sup>. The second interviewee was a former independent candidate<sup>xiv</sup> within the Virgin islands 2007 elections who currently is a talk show co-host and political activist.

Third, several questions were formulated for the interviews. The questions that were more relevant to this paper were as follows: (1) Have there been any success stories that you can recall with CARICOM negotiating international trade agreements? (2) What do you think are the reasons why difficulties arise within CARICOM negotiations on trade and economic development matters? (3) What in your mind created the conflicting positions that resulted during the recent Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations among the Caribbean islands? (4) How do you think CARICOM should approach future negotiations and agreements to overcome the negotiating hurdles that have occurred in the past?

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<sup>xiii</sup> The first interview was conducted on April 6, 2009 with Dr. the Honorable, Kedrick Pickering, Opposition Member of the Virgin Islands House of Assembly.

<sup>xiv</sup> The second interview was conducted on April 20, 2009 with Mr. Richard, Courtney de Castro, a Senior Lecturer of the HLSCC, a political activist, a former political candidate and the co-host for “Speak Your Mind” Talk Show.

Fourth, after obtaining the responses from the interviews and reviewing the other documentary sources, an evaluation of the CARICOM, the CRNM and the EPA was undertaken. Fifth, the exercise was evaluated.

### **Research Findings**

To recall, the BVI is an associate member of the CARICOM and not of CSME. However, it still has an interest in the progress of the regional grouping and its trade and economic development initiatives, despite of the disappointing efforts of CARICOM to move its economic agenda forward on the global stage. Given the nature of the topic, it was felt that the better methodology to apply would be the qualitative research method, which consists mainly of interviews. From these interviews, a number of salient points were revealed.

First, the establishment of a unit responsible for developing, coordinating and executing an overall negotiating strategy for various external negotiations in the region was an excellent decision because it would be impossible for all Caribbean countries to represent themselves at international trade forums. In the like manner, for increased fairness and better coordination to result, negotiations on behalf of CARICOM would better be handled at the professional level and not at the political level. The major drawback to this, however, is that CRNM as a regional organization must still function within a political framework. Furthermore, it would be virtually impossible to cover the economic interests of all CARICOM member states involved. Regrettably, this situation developed during the recently-concluded EPA negotiations. Hence, divisions emerged during the period prior to the signing of the EPA document.

Second, the structure of the CRNM seems adequate from observation and included many opportunities for consultations between management, political leaders and other advisors

throughout the negotiating process. However, as it is with other organizations, having a structure on paper and having it work in reality are two different things, and this appears to be the situation with the CRNM. The CRNM already has a presence outside of the region and this allows for greater oversight of international agreements and would reinforce the region's position on the global stage. Therefore, scrapping the CRNM and integrating it into the CARICOM Secretariat will not remove the problems being experienced during the negotiating process. Instead, what should be addressed are the differing political and economic positions adopted by the political leaders who change their trade and economic development positions every election cycle.

Third, the EPAs will provide special arrangements for this particular group and, as opposed to the other ACP countries, the group of LDCs will be invited to reject the EPAs and continue trade relations under the EBA regulation. In other words, the EPA did not have to be accepted in the format that it was by CARICOM and could have been rejected and renegotiated, as proposed by Guyana. To repeat, no government of CARICOM, except Guyana, opted to engage any section of civil society to benefit from their criticisms/reservations, even if they disagreed with their positions. Instead, calls by civil society representatives for dialogue were contemporarily ignored. In the future it is recommended that CARICOM leaders at least consider the positions put forward by civil society representatives who are well qualified in their respective fields. It is also suggested that having now signed the EPA, a chance should be given to the agreement to produce the possible benefits it has the capacity to generate.

Fourth, it was felt that there are still some signs of "colonization" even after most CARICOM countries have achieved independence, and this holds true because CARICOM leaders are still allowing the "Divide and Concur" tactics to succeed within the trade negotiation

process. In that connection, CARICOM leaders should not be allowed to go behind the negotiators' backs (CRNM) and negotiate their agreements on their own terms. It is believed that these tactics were applied within the EPA negotiation process and consequently, made the earlier portion of the negotiation process ineffective. To avoid these future dilemmas, it is recommended that all parties to the agreements be involved in the negotiations from beginning to end, and that all parties sign the agreement at the same time.

Fifth, the Caribbean needs to become more aggressive when negotiating trade agreements with the developed countries. In this regard, CARICOM should propose that the developed countries provide more assistance to the Caribbean, for example with the drug trafficking problem that is creating a lot of the crime and violence within its countries. It is understood that the Caribbean acts simply as a transshipment point for drug trafficking but has been tremendously affected with escalating crime rates and disintegrating societies. As a result, the region is fighting a losing battle when it comes to improving the quality of life and the standard of living for its people. It is therefore imperative that CARICOM brings such problems to the forefront when negotiating agreements with developed countries. It is also important that they ensure that these agreements deliver sustainable projects that the entire region could benefit from.

Sixth, it was found that CARICOM's ideals are commendable, especially as they relate to the CSME initiative. Yet, there is little support for the latter, as there is still too much apprehension against the free movement of labor. It is therefore recommended that members and associate members states become engaged in dialogues at the regional level, to discuss comprehensively the benefits and concerns that the CSME initiative will bring to the entire

Caribbean. It is intended that such a discussion would facilitate the objective review of CSME. Another recommendation is to hold a referendum vote on the issue in each CARICOM country.

## **Conclusion**

The study attempted to examine the BVI's perspective of the recent trade negotiations of the EPAs. To conduct such an analysis, the study focused on its object, CARICOM, the CRNM and the EPA. Afterwards, the study proceeded with the qualitative research analysis. Given the limited information circulated on the EPA in the BVI, it was felt that the sampling design should involve face-to-face interviews with persons who have a political background. As a result two interviews were conducted with an Opposition member of the Virgin Islands House of Assembly and a former independent candidate, who also is a political activist, and a co-host of a television talk show.

From the research findings, a number of salient features emerged. First, CARICOM formed CRNM in April 1997 to develop, coordinate and execute an overall negotiating strategy for various external negotiations in which the region was involved. The institution engages in negotiations at four general levels, namely: (a) the Multilateral Level; (b) the Inter-regional Level; (c) the Hemispheric Level; and (d) the Bilateral Level. Yet, the political agendas of Caribbean leaders are constantly interjected during the periods leading up to the signing of trade and economic development agreements. This in turn, not only undermines the early negotiating efforts of the CRNM but also creates political and economic divisions among CARICOM leadership before agreements are signed.

Second, the EPA did not have to be accepted in the format that it was by CARICOM and could have been rejected and renegotiated, as proposed by Guyana. Regrettably, no government

of CARICOM, except Guyana, opted to engage any section of civil society to benefit from their criticisms/reservations, even if they disagreed with their positions. In the future it is recommended that CARICOM leaders at least consider the positions put forward by civil society representatives who are well qualified in their respective fields.

Third, the region must make a conclusive decision on CSME's future. Likewise, CSME must be given a greater opportunity to work. There is still value in the CARICOM ideal and how successful this ideal becomes will depend on how that vision is articulated to the people of the Caribbean. Consequently, it is recommended that a referendum vote be called within all CARICOM member and associate member states to determine how the constituents of the Caribbean really feel about the CSME initiative.

Fourth, there seems to be a lack of vision among CARICOM leaders who seem to fall subject to the "Divide and Conquer" tactics of the developed countries. To overcome this, the leaders of the Caribbean must find the commonalities between their territories and use these commonalities to advance CARICOM's initiatives. In the same vein, CARICOM must become bolder within these international negotiation processes and push for sustainable projects that will benefit the entire region, while at the same time addressing the social and economic problems of the Caribbean societies.

Overall, the study concluded that as the EPA negotiations progressed, further divisions formed within the Caribbean Community leaving into question, "How will the EPA and the relations among Caribbean leaders now affect plans for the transformation of CARICOM into a single economy, as envisaged for 2015?" In the same vein, there is the belief in the BVI that the EPA may have deserved another review, as was recommended by representatives of civil society. However, with the agreement already in place, the region should now try to capitalize on



the benefits that can be brought forth from it. It is also recommended that other opportunities for trade and economic development in an effort to address the EPA's shortcomings be sought. To this end, it would be advantageous to consider on a more serious note, the development of a comprehensive regional market for the trading of goods and services, that is, the CSME.

To check the validity of these results, it is recommended that further research be conducted using a larger sample size of its interviewees. It would also be useful to compare the results of this study with similar studies conducted in other Caribbean countries, for comparison purposes.

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