

**The Planning Institute of Jamaica  
(PIOJ)**



***‘Welcoming Remarks: Regional Policy  
Dialogue.’***

**By  
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Ladies and Gentlemen, Welcome to the Regional Policy Dialogue. I hope that much dialogue will be expressed and exchanged here today so that we leave here (i) more appreciative of the challenges of the Caribbean to fulfil the MDG Agenda and (ii) better able to execute the necessary tasks.

The global commitment to the MDGs, while important, is unlikely to reduce global inequity being made greater by the process of globalization. The minimum requirements which the MDGs stipulate will not result in a sustainable global environment; and even these are not likely to be met.

The reason why I appear so cynical, or even pessimistic is because of the reality: global imperatives have changed. The imperatives are now:

- ✓ War against terrorism (which is diverting resources)
- ✓ The country-specific priorities of the developed countries.
- ✓ Globalization and the new trading regimes (which are undermining the livelihood of the most vulnerable).

Whether or not we want to recognize it, globalization poses the greatest threat to the achievement of the MDGs. Globalization is undermining at the same time that we are trying to build our capacities to face the challenges of the MDGs. It's almost a zero-sum game. We are, thus, caught in a paradoxical situation or even, I might dare to say, a vicious cycle.

My experience is showing me that we can implement all the needed reforms; play by the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO); implement the Washington Consensus; and still not achieve the economic growth and improvements in living standards that are necessary. The latest report from the World Bank, on Latin America states: “Latin America Needs to Cut Poverty to Boost Growth.” The title of the Report is: “Poverty Reduction and Growth: Virtuous and Vicious Circles.” The Report paints a very dismal picture of the prospects for growth which are not dissimilar to what I have stated here. “While growth is key for poverty reduction, poverty itself is hampering the achievement of high and sustained growth rates in Latin America, which remains one of the most unequal regions in the world with a close to a fourth of the population living on less than US\$2.00 a day.”

The Report goes on to state other facts which are instructive for the Caribbean region as the MDGs groups the Caribbean with Latin America. A comparison is made between China and Latin America. “While China experienced annual per capita growth of about 8.5 percent between 1981 and 2,000, reducing poverty by 42 percentage points, Latin America’s per capita GDP declined by 0.7 percent during the 1980s and increased by about 1.5 percent per year in the 1990s, ***with no significant changes in poverty levels.***” Only Jamaica and the Dominican Republic were compared for the Caribbean region. Jamaica underwent a decline in poverty of 15 percentage points between the early 1990s and 2000 due to the myriad of social interventions – which were grouped under the National Poverty

Eradication Programme – while in the Dominican Republic there was, conversely, an 8 percentage point increase over the same period.

The question that arises is: why is there such a disparity? This can be attributed to the things that we need to do.

- We need to invest in globally competitive industries.
- We need to make existing industries competitive.
- We need to invest in a new labour force with new skills.
- We need to embrace change in whatever form it takes: technological, infrastructural, etc.
- We need to invest in new country-specific planning models.

Let me pick up on this last point. The present model has weakened the effectiveness of the State to deal with the issues of the poor. The state has become illegitimate in some areas/communities. Therefore, simply refining our measuring tools and indicators for the MDGs without the fundamental issues of poverty, economic growth and equity being addressed will not advance our work.

There have been many initiatives over the decades: Decade of Women, Year of the Child, Year for People with Disabilities, etc. These have all been global initiatives just like the MDGs. But, at the end of the consultancies and the raising of awareness strategies, the standards of living of the poor haven't improved. Only the consultants and those who write papers benefit.

What I am doing here, essentially, is issuing a challenge to us all. We need to be bolder in the visions we have for our respective Caribbean countries. We need to “Do what successful people and societies have done.” It is those countries that ignore the policies and strategies I mentioned earlier and manage their societies by deriving specific policies and targeting infrastructure that fare the best.

The challenge I offer is for us to embed the MDGs or any other global initiatives within a framework of national priorities rather than just focusing blindly on a specific initiative. Recently, I perused the World Bank’s 1952 Jamaica Development Report. That Report focuses on the same issues that the MDGs is touching on. We do not add anything novel – only more precision; this won’t make a fundamental difference. While we are here discussing measurement of indicators, there are global decisions being taken that will undermine the realization of the MDGs.

What really matters now is: the WTO; how globalization is undermining these MDGs; and the character of technology.

So, rather than isolating these tasks in isolation, we need to explore them within the context of global realities so that they remain relevant. We must remember that: “Real life is what happens while planners are planning.”

Thank you!