

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN  
BARBADOS:  
A STUDY OF A LONG-TERM EFFORT

C. A. S. Hynam (Emeritus)  
University of Alberta, Canada

INTRODUCTION. This paper has two objectives: 1) to delimit and define Community Development more precisely on the basis of empirical data, and 2) to test the hypothesis that Community Development depends on success in permanently and progressively developing total human and material resources.

This is not an attempt to validate this hypothesis with only one case study. Adequate testing will require the analysis and statistical treatment of a large number of similar cases, in some of which community development principles will have been followed and in others not. It is hoped, however, that this study will encourage a research trend and that it will widen Community Development's perspective and perhaps increase its usefulness to the Third World.

At the Second International Consultation on Community Development held at St. Thomas University, New Brunswick, Canada, in June 1974, the group discussed the subject "What is Community Development? Definitions, Theories, Models" differed on many points of definition etc., but came up unanimously with the following as "indispensable community development criteria" (Hynam, 1974):

1. Conscientisation, or the awakening of the people's awareness of the true state of affairs.

2. Education motivation, until the people concerned consider the undertaking as theirs.

3. Participation in decision making.

4. Emphasis on the whole community.

5. Self help toward maximizing the use of indigenous resources.

6. Creating effective linkage with external influences.

It is generally accepted historically that "Community Development has grown out of the earlier concept of 'mass education', a term used by the Secretary of State's

Advisory Committee on Education in its report entitled 'Mass Education in African Society'. The publication of the report in 1944 can be taken as a starting point in the evolution of community development as an arm of Government policy" (H.M.S.O., 1968, p.l.).

SOCIO-HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. It is the Thesis of this paper that if the "indispensable community Development criteria" listed above are used as indicators, then Community Development was, intuitively as it were, initiated by a political leader, Samuel Jackman Prescod, the grandson of a slave, in the little island in the then British West Indies about 100 years before it was officially recognized elsewhere; and that following its initiation Community Development procedures have been continued, wittingly and/or unwittingly, up to the present with outstandingly good results.

Barbados is so small and "insignificant" that it is not surprising that the early initiation of Community Development being claimed herein would have been completely overlooked by Community Development chroniclers, but Prescod, who is claimed as the initiator, has not been entirely ignored by historians. Hoyos stresses the fact that he was far ahead of his time. "The remarkable thing," he says, "is that at a time when ideas on the subject were quite confused, he saw clearly the vital difference between representative and responsible government. It was in 1847 that he first put forward practical proposals for an Executive Committee for Barbados . . . The point I want to make here is that Prescod submitted his scheme one year before Lord Elgin introduced responsible government in Canada and seven years before an Executive Committee was set up in Jamaica." (Hoyos, 1961, p. 5.)

To return to the matter of the introduction of Community Development procedures, the setting in the British West Indies in the earlier part of the nineteenth century was ripe of courageous innovation.

There was a social revolution of major proportions when the former Negro slave took his place alongside the white citizen

in schools, in churches and in other ways. But power remained in the hands of the "planters," who had no intention of lowering the franchise sufficiently to allow an appreciable number of ex-slaves to vote. By 1839 it was obvious to the Colonial Office in London that the abolition of slavery had not been followed by reduction in economic exploitation; in fact, opportunities for gross economic exploitation were greater since the planters no longer had the responsibility for the health and well-being of those who worked for them.

The Colonial Office was sincere in the belief that the 'salvation of the West Indies lay not in representative government but in Crown Colony rule. Under this system the Crown would undertake the direct protection of the unrepresented classes . . . ' And the Colonial Office soon implemented their thoughts by abolishing representative government in all of the British West Indian Islands, except in Barbados. (Hynam & Hobart, 1965, pp. 8-9)

The exception resulted from Prescod's intervention. That he had the motivation and courage to intervene is amazing. Here was a population of about 15,000 whites and, apart from the Free Coloureds, about five times as many Negroes who had recently been freed from complete subjugation to the whites by a benevolent Crown. Now it was being announced that the Crown was again coming to the assistance of the Negroes.

The Colonial Office must have been surprised and puzzled when, instead of gratitude and jubilation from the Barbadian ex-slaves who they were trying to help, they came up against resistance. Such resistance was undoubtedly due to the extraordinary powers of persuasion and stimulation of a leader who was motivated by visions of the future. In 1834 he got himself elected to the House of Assembly (the first coloured man in such a position), which meant that many whites must have voted for him. He was also helped in his campaign against the paternalism of Crown Colony rule by the fact that he published a newspaper of his own- "The Liberal".

Hereunder are brief comments indicating the relevance of the "indispensable commun-

ity development criteria" mentioned above.

Criteria 1, Conscientisation and 2, Education-motivation until the people consider the undertaking as THEIRS, can be considered together:

Prescod saw the value of representative institutions and recognised the necessity of fighting to preserve them. Secondly, he realized that such institutions must be reformed and adapted to meet the conditions of a new society. Thirdly, he managed to enlist the support of the emancipated classes and imbued them with a genuine love of representative government . . . The goal he had set himself was to show that his people could work out their salvation by training themselves in the business of self-government instead of relying on the benevolence of English statesmen. (Hoyos, 1961, pp. 24-25)

Re. criterion 3, Participation in decision-making, Prescod was deeply concerned with getting more and more people to take part in deciding who were to govern them. "Prescod's first triumph was to win a vote for the free Coloured People from the Colonial Office . . . his initial success and his continued agitation of the question entitle him to be called the 'Father of Franchise Reform'" (Hoyos, 1961, pp. 24-25) in the island.

Criterion 4, Emphasis on the whole community and 6, Creating effective linkages with external influences, can also be usefully considered together. Prescod was sent to England by the House of Assembly to support Barbados' plea to the Colonial Office for retention of representative government. He was:

"shrewd enough to know that in the great battle he had undertaken he must have the support of powerful allies abroad. It is of no small significance that Prescod enjoyed the friendship of Lord John Russell, the famous English statesman who was the first Secretary of State for the Colonies and later Prime Minister of England . . . He [Prescod] was particularly interested in the great parliamentary reforms framed by Russell and Durham. His contact with these two

English statesmen strengthened his conviction that self-government was the precious thing which all Barbadians, whether white, coloured or black, should unite to defend." (Hoyos, 1961, pp. 25-26)

With regard to criterion 5, Self-help toward maximizing the use of indigenous resources, there are those who claim that the representative of government, as they did, feeling sure that it would only be temporary; confident that the Barbados government would, sooner or later, have to apply to the Mother Country for a grant-in-aid. If this had happened, in keeping with one of the unwritten rules of British Colonialism - he who pays the piper must be allowed to call the tune - Barbados would almost certainly have lost her existing status and become a typical Crown Colony. But strong belief in the principle of representative government and the fear of losing it undoubtedly stimulated people of all colours (albeit for different reasons) to an achievement, which surely must be one of the most outstanding in the history of small "underdeveloped" territories with limited resources. She balanced her budget without external financial aid and has continued to balance it year after year up to date including the critical year 1975 when the oil crisis wrecked the economies of countries that were very much richer in natural resources than Barbados.

From Prescod's time up to today, self-help has become a way of life in Barbados, and in this connection there are many very interesting individual and family histories awaiting the historian, novelist or social scientist.

#### SELF HELP IN BARBADOS TODAY

Barbados is the most easterly of the former British West Indian (now Commonwealth Caribbean) islands. When first settled by Englishmen in 1627 it was uninhabited, although there is evidence that Arawak Indians had not long before occupied it, or at least visited it regularly. Today it is one of the most thickly populated islands in the world. A census in 1971 gave a total figure of 243,757 on its 166 square miles - a density of over 1460 per square mile. "At present

its population is predominantly of negro extraction, descendants of slaves brought over mostly in the seventeenth century from Africa to work in the sugar-cane fields, white, and mixed people almost entirely African and white with a very small number of East Indians. The relative figures in 1970 were 224,318 negro, 9,534 white, 9,305 mixed and 675 East Indian." (Barclays Bank, 1975, p. 76.)

A government supported Planned Parenthood program has been active in the island since about 1950. "The population of Barbados reversing the general pattern for Caribbean countries decreased from 244,000 in 1965 to 239,000 in 1975. (Population Reference Bureau, 1976, p. 158)

The island has had representative government directly under the British Crown (except for a short period (1958-1962) when it became a sovereign state and a member of the Commonwealth. Its House of Assembly is the second oldest outside of the United Kingdom.

The present Constitution calls for a Government comprising the British Queen Elizabeth, Queen of Barbados and The Commonwealth, a Senate and an elected House of Assembly.

Another example of community self-help is the fact that not only did the island balance its budget in 1975, but in that year it also "managed to cut its inflation rate within half . . . its wages restraint programmes, the improvement of its system of distribution of imports and the world wide easing of commodity prices helped in this direction." (McKinney, 1976)

Worthy of note also is that from her own resources Barbados has managed to raise its National old-age pensions to the very poor (those with an income of \$15.00 per week or under) from \$1.80 per week in 1961 to \$16.00 per week in 1977.

The writer resided in Barbados as a participant observer from May 1977 to May 1978 and it is abundantly evident to him that not only self-help but all of the other criteria referred to above are today part of the modus operandi of the Barbadian political and civic system and, in some cases, increasingly so since complete Independence in 1966. For instance, with reference to criteria

1 and 2, Conscientisation & Education-motivation until the people concerned consider the undertaking as THEIRS, during the year when the writer was in residence there was hardly an issue of the leading daily newspaper which did not refer to some seminar, meeting or lecture whose purpose was to make citizens at all levels - bus drivers, 4H Club-members, social workers, Youth Clubs, medical technologists, etc. - more and more aware of their duties and responsibilities and/or motivate them to better community service.

With regard to Criterion 3, Participation in Decision-making, Prescod would have been pleased if he could have heard the following statement made by the present Prime Minister two days after his party was swept into power in 1976 by a large majority: "I consider myself a Democratic Socialist-one who is prepared to make the necessary compromises to preserve democracy. What is most important is that the voters have the chance to throw you out when they decide your time has come;" (Larkin, 1976, p. 12)

In connection with people participation at lower levels, for about three centuries up to 1959, eleven Vestries of the Church of England, one for each of the 11 parishes of the island, formed the system of local government. For a short period after 1959 (less than a decade) Bridgetown, the capital, was made a Municipal City and the rest of the island administered by a Northern and a Southern District Council. Such Councils gave wider representation than did the Vestries and also simplified taxation. Following the report of a Specialist, however, these Councils were dissolved in 1967 and their functions transferred to an interim Commissioner for Local Government. In 1969 he, in turn, was relieved of his duties, and responsibility for the various services concerned was assigned to the Central Government. This centralization enabled certain National projects to be more easily established, e.g. the National Insurance Scheme and Old Age pensions for the very poor, and contact was maintained with the general public by the creation of a number of statutory Boards, with Constitutions and functions laid down by law. Some of these Boards have very wide powers. In ad-

dition there is a great variety of non-government Associations, Committees, Clubs etc., some of whom, like the Chamber of Commerce, the Barbados Workers' Union and the Barbados Christian Council, are powerful enough to influence Government decisions.

Recently (October 1977) Government has taken steps to:

fulfil an election pledge on workers participation in management with the appointment of an 11-member committee to examine and submit recommendations on the matter. . . After due consultation with workers' and employers' representatives and all other interested parties the Party will institute appropriate measures to achieve full worker participation and representation in management.

The present owners of capital will be encouraged by tax incentives and otherwise to institute profit sharing and share incentive schemes so as to broaden the basis of the country's wealth. (Advocate-News, 1977, p.1.)

In connection with Criterion 6, Creating effective linkages with external influences, in late 1977 the island had ambassadorial, consular and/or other representational arrangements with 36 countries, the Pan-American Health Organization and the Organization of American States. Other links are in the process of being forged.

The External Affairs Minister recently declared that "Government's policy on opening diplomatic relations with all countries should now be well recognized. He submitted that ideology was a fact of life but so too was intercourse between nations . . . Mr. Forde [the External Affairs Minister] believed that parliamentary democracy was too well established in Barbados for it to be easily thrust aside by Barbadians opening relations with countries of Eastern Europe. (Burrowes, 1977, p. 1.)

The small Government-run Community Development Division existing in Barbados today evolved as an offshoot from a Social Welfare Department established in 1949 following civil disturbances in the previous decade. Over the years it has been variously attached to the Ministries of Health, Trade, and

Education; now it is within the Ministry of Labour and Community Affairs. It appears to be quite efficiently run within its limited sphere.

Data presented so far establish that Community Development Procedures (as per criteria listed) were established by Prescod in the middle of the nineteenth century and that such procedures are being actively followed today. Also, such data together with the following quotations covering the years from about 1838 to 1977 support the assumption that Community Development procedures were continuous from the days of Prescod up to today:

Many people said that emancipation, [which was completed in 1838], would bring a train of evils upon Barbados. . . that the cost of producing sugar would go up; that the amount of sugar produced would go down; that the slaves would refuse to work after freedom had been granted to them. . .

But none of these things happened in Barbados. It is quite true that in most of the other colonies the end of the old order meant the complete overthrow of the planter. But this was certainly not the case in Barbados. (Hoyos, 1960, 125-127)

The Barbadians formed a compact community whose members recognized their dependence upon one another in spite of racial and social divisions and had worked out an acceptable method of living together. The economic stability of the island was shown by the way in which it weathered the economic storms of the eighteen-forties and maintained its production of sugar. (Parry & Sherlock, 1956, p. 216)

The white people of the island numbered only 5 per cent of the population. . . A social revolution of no little significance has taken place during the past few decades, for the descendants of the slaves, who once cultivated the land under a system of forced labour, now, [1962], occupy the high places and govern the island. (Times, 1962, ii) . . .

And so it was until the seizure of poli-

tical power by non-whites. To understand the rapidity and extent of change in the past 20 years, one must remember its racial and demographic context. As in Jamaica, the gradual dwindling of the white population coupled with the growth of a sizable mulatto population helped to define the relevance of race to the boundaries of status groups. . .

Hence, when the whites lost absolute political power, an educated, ambitious elite of non-whites stood ready to exploit their opportunities.

Furthermore, despite recognized social differences between colored and black Barbadians, the political ideology of the new leadership tended to ignore these distinctions; (Mack, 1967, p. 158)

By the 1940's, the legislature of Barbados . . . was the oldest in the region, and already was representative of all races and classes; its standards of education for young people of all races was the best of all the territories; and, it was the most stable and peaceful of them all. Colour discrimination had vanished and not just put into reverse as has happened in some unfortunate independent countries; living conditions for the poorer people had improved; and wage rates had reached a high level. All this had been achieved without a bill of rights. (Blackburne, 1976, p. 87)

Barbados is a mixed, free enterprise economy with a system of [elected] government that lays down the ground rules and like a good umpire, ensures that these are kept by the many enterprising members of the most vibrant and exemplary economies of the area. In fact, their traditions of management and national efficiency are in no way altered, endangered or upset by changes in government. Even though the roads are narrow, they are well paved and smooth. Their telephone system is modern and works. Their buses are clean and on time. Their water system is an example to the region. And, of course, one must not forget that . . . [Barbados] is the backbone of our cricketing success.

There are other virtues to Barbados such as the way they manage to import such a

wide range of consumer goods that even we in Trinidad do not see, and yet are still able to run a tight and steady ship of state.

Thus, armed with a system, will power and generous inputs of genuine hard work, Barbadians are making Barbados a highly respectable country beholden to no one and on their knees to no other country. (Trinidad Guardian, 1977, 3)

**CONCLUSION.** Reference is made once more to the opening paragraphs of this paper, where it is stated that this case study, and, hopefully, others to follow, is concerned with the relation between community development procedures and success in permanent and progressive development of total human and material community resources. The main reason for Barbados' success, in my view, is more than one hundred years of a community development political, civic, and social program.

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