

The Role of Youth and Young Persons in National Development

It is an established fact that the youth and young persons constitute the majority of any population. The statistics for the Caribbean region in 2019, suggested that the youth accounts for approximately sixty three percent of the population. This means that demographic of Caribbean societies is characterized by an aging population. This underlines the fact that there is room for the youth to play in all aspects of national development. It is to be expected that there will be constant social, cultural, economic and political changes, as a consequence of the generation gaps.

In reflecting on the regional political history, the road to independence commenced in 1804 when Haiti, a former French colony of Saint-Domingue on Hispaniola, became the first Caribbean nation to gain independence from its European colonial power. The records show that the Dominican Republic then got its independence from Haiti in 1844. This event was followed with Cuba obtaining its independence from Spain in 1902, and with Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago gaining their political independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. The decade of the 1960's has special significance for Barbados as it was on 30 November, 1966, that it took its political independence from the United Kingdom, which is familiar referred to as the mother country.

The independence revolution in the region continued to gain currency with Bahamas earning its political independence in 1973; to be followed by Grenada in 1974; Dominica in 1978; St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1979; Antigua and Barbuda in 1981; and St. Kitts and Nevis in 1983. It is at this juncture that the region begun to take on a new face, as political independence meant that it had to establish platforms for the future development of each island state. This meant that the focus had to be placed on youth empowerment and engagement. There was an increasing awareness that young people had to perform the role as change agents and as strategic players and partners in national development. This necessitated that careful attention was paid to youth development policies and practices.

The Caribbean region has continued to experience the global problem of youth unemployment. Employment is fundamental to the empowerment and engagement of people, as it is the base for social and economic development and advancement. With a high incidence of youth employment, the potential is there for business development and growth. The changing social and economic landscape, coupled with a renewed and energized people, should be enough to stimulate the political will to make decisions that are beneficial to enhancing national growth and development. This should be driven by a consciousness that political independence was not only to secure political enfranchisement, but to ensure the economic and social upliftment of the people.

At a time when youth unemployment remains rampant across the globe, young people may consider that they are being robbed of the opportunity to make the level of intended contribution to national development. According to the International Labour Organization, *The Role of Youth and Young Persons in National Development*: Dennis de Peiza: Labour Management and Employment Relations Consultant: Regional Management Services Inc.; 29 November, 2019

70 million are actively seeking employment. This number represents 40% of the world's unemployment. The observation is made that the vast majority of those who are employed, find themselves in low paying jobs. They fall in the category of vulnerable workers, those who have low quality and unsustainable jobs. Moreover, the contention remains that these young workers are being placed in precarious jobs.

This brings us to the point of having to reflect on the problems which impacted on our societies in a pre-independence era, and to carefully assess where we are as a nation in the post independence era. If as a nation we are experiencing many of the pre independence challenges, then there is a need to do some serious introspection to ascertain where the failings lie. The youth on the other hand have to take some responsibility, for as the change agents, they must demand their space in assuming leadership roles in order to influence change, through the rolling out ideas and implementation of initiatives.

Accepting that the youth and young persons constitute the majority in our society, there can be no legitimate excuse if they fail to take the lead in safeguarding the future. Should they fail to do so, they would have failed our independence forefathers who through the gaining of political independence, passed the baton to them to chart the way forward for the nation.