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National Youth Development: The Bahamas, a Model for the Caribbean

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September 1997

(Jim, This is Volume VIII, Study 5)

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The Bahamas, a General Overview

Beyond the Southeastern corner of the United States of America, The Commonwealth of the Bahamas lays claim to nearly 100,000 square miles of the Atlantic Ocean. Encompassing approximately 700 islands and cays, the total land mass area is estimated at 5,382 square miles. New Providence, one of the 29 major islands of the Bahamas chain, and the island on which the capital Nassau is found, constitutes only 80 of this total square mileage. Roughly 67.5 percent of the estimated 275,000 populations reside on New Providence island (only the twelfth largest in the archipelago), to generate a population density of over 2,300 persons per square mile.

Grand Bahama, the fourth largest island (530 sq. miles) is home to the nation's 'Second City' Freeport, and to over 16 percent of the country's estimated population; thus projecting a population per square mile ratio of 77.2:1. Andros, the largest island (2,300 sq. miles), is home to only about 3.2 percent of the entire population. The other islands, known more commonly as our Family of Islands are even more sparsely populated. The vast acreage in the family islands for the most part lies dormant as residents tend to migrate in large numbers to the more developed New Providence and Grand Bahamas islands, and in pursuance of better educational, employment and business opportunities.

With the long extinct Arawak and Lucayan Indians being the first known inhabitants of the islands, the Bahamas shares much of the rich history of the Caribbean. The dual ancestry links of both early colonialists and of the African citizens brought to the islands in slavery, binds the existence of the peoples of the Caribbean.

On July 10, 1973, the Bahamas achieved its Independence from the British Commonwealth,

and claimed its status as a sovereign nation. Like many other Caribbean nations, its democratic styled governance, is based on the British Westminster model. The Governor-General, appointed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, represents the Crown; and the Prime Minister, an elected official, the people of the Bahamas. Parliament, a bicameral system, is comprised of a Lower House, The House of Assembly and an Upper House, or Senate. The House of Assembly consists of 40 elected Members and the Senate, 16 appointed posts. The ruling Party, The Free National Movement (FNM) holds thirty-five seats in the Lower House; and the Official Opposition, the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) the remaining five. General elections were last held in March 1997, and will become due again in the year 2002.

The functions of the Government are carried out primarily, through the following Ministries:

- **The Ministry of National Security;**
- **The Ministry of Foreign Affairs;**
- **The Ministry of Tourism;**
- **The Ministry of Education;**
- **The Ministry of Finance and Planning;**
- **The Ministry of Economic Development;**
- **The Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Justice;**
- **The Ministry of Labour, Immigration & Training;**
- **The Ministry of Housing and Social Development;**
- **The Ministry of Consumer Welfare and Aviation;**
- **The Ministry of Public Works;**

- The Ministry of Transport;
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries;
- The Ministry of Health; and
- The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture.

The Case for National Youth Development

Youth Development

The last official general population census indicated that approximately 62.94 percent of the total Bahamian population is under the age of thirty years. In 1996, estimates showed that 30.4 percent of all Bahamians, almost a third, are under fifteen years age. With most of our people still to see their thirtieth birthdays, our policies should be reflective of a youthful and developing nation. Our nation itself has only just celebrated its 24th birthday having gained independent status in 1973.

As we live in the dynamic worlds of industry, enterprise, health, education, technology, etc.; and in a society of changing norms and still evolving principles and ideals, the policies by which we set our standards of living must be developmental such that the world is able to witness the true unfolding of a nation.

Our Ministry with responsibility for youth, has sponsored a few youth programmes over the years and have overseen a number of private initiatives in the Bahamas. There has however not been an approach that has laid out plainly a plan for all Bahamian youth. The

programmes over the years have oftentimes targeted only specific groups and whereas some of them may have been relatively successful, not nearly enough of Bahamian young people have benefited, or have even had the opportunity simply to participate.

To reach as many Bahamians as possible and as feasible, we must set our sights first at reaching all of them. Exercise an approach of national youth inclusion; offering to all, the same kinds of opportunities. To achieve a national effort toward youth development and service, we need to coordinate a system where we would have pooled all of the scattered civic and other organizations; we would have given each fragment a national role to play. Any sort of national goal can only be achieved through the consolidated efforts of an entire country.

In 1993, a Consultative Committee was commissioned by the Government of the Bahamas, to produce a comprehensive report on the plight of young people in our nation. This Committee, at the end of their deliberations penned a report which cited that part of their main focus was to look at the forces which impact on youth. They investigated youth's expectations of themselves, their attitudes and various other factors including certain physical aspects (e.g. housing, urbanization and health). In particular, they explored the roles of society: family values, ethics, the media, politics and of course the economy, education and religion. They concluded their work by underscoring the need in our country specifically for National Youth Policy, and National Youth Development programmes.

The whole concept of National Youth Development is fairly new to our society. Of course the country has certain national health issues, national labour and employment issues, national economic and financial issues, and also social issues on a country level. But blanket policies are wholly insufficient, when tailoring especially to suit young people is necessary.

There are national youth health issues; there are national youth labour and youth employment issues; there are economic and social issues which revolve solely around young people. When financial analysts advise investors, they encourage their younger clientele to invest in income enhancing vehicles; such that they may improve they current status, while at the same time lay a foundation for a far more fruitful future. They encourage them to be aggressive, to meet challenges and to rise above them. Older clients are advised to play it safe. To concentrate on finding shelter for what they already have/earn. To plan toward a retirement such that it is a financially uneventful, but comfortable journey to the end of life.

We need policy that recognizes that there are needs and interests specific to young persons; that their's are independent goals and objectives; fulfilment of which, is the necessary first step to sustainable growth and development of our nation.

The Plight of our Youth

- **Education and Employment**

“The mission of Education is to provide all persons in the Bahamas an opportunity to receive an education that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills required for work and life in a democratic society.” The question here really is how have we defined “work and life in a democratic society” and is it entirely appropriate. As one Ministry of Youth official put it, “we’re equipping children to lay tiles, when we should be laying a foundation for life.”

The Bahamian education system is structured as follows: primary school education (grades 1 - 6), junior high (grades 7 - 9), and senior high school (grades 10 - 12); and the major post secondary institutions are The College of the Bahamas, The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institution, and the Bahamas Hotel training College. There are over 62,000 students enrolled in the education system. But what are they learning?

The Bahamas Government Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) examinations are taken in the final year of senior high school, in all relevant subject areas. These examinations are in essence the sum of a student's aptitude in the respective disciplines after years of formal instruction, and basically represents their stake in the next phase of their lives. North American universities for example, accept Bahamian students on the basis of a minimum SAT score and/or passes of grade 'C' and above in at least five subject areas of these exams; two of which must be Mathematics and English Language. Many entry level jobs require that applicants have at least three grades of 'C' and above (in instances two) in the same, and again including Mathematics and English Language. In 1995, of these final examinations, and of all students sitting them in the Bahamas, only 23.32 percent (937/4018) obtained grades of 'C' or better in Mathematics, and 14.06 percent (556/3954) earned at least a 'C' grade in English Language. Further, there were twelfth graders who didn't even qualify to take either one of the two essential subject examinations.

Before the start of the new school year, The Ministry of Education announced, that it had signed employment contracts with additional expatriate staff, to teach in areas such as Spanish, Woodwork, and Arts & Craft. In our schools we have foreign educators who teach subjects like physical education, history , mathematics and science; and the notion of non-

Bahamian educators instructing our children in Arts & Craft begs the question as to whether or not lessons of our traditions and cultures through our craft can be sufficiently conveyed by persons other than Bahamians. Although thousands of Bahamians have benefited from the classrooms headed by non-nationals, for years, hundred of work permits are issued to foreign educators, nurses, engineers, bankers, accounts, contractors and building construction positions; in areas of insurance, biology, chemistry and the environment. The issue is, are we as a nation educating Bahamians in line with some deliberate developmental goal, such that we may in years to come, Bahamianize employment at all levels in as many areas as possible.

In 1995 and 1996, imports were valued at \$1,155.4 million and \$1,261.6 million. Conversely, we exported only \$175.9 million and \$201.7 million in goods in the same periods. (Note: for the same years, tourists spent \$1,245.4 million and \$1,343.9 million in the Bahamas). The major categories of imports include food and live animals; mineral fuels, lubricants, etc.; manufactured goods; machinery and transport equipment; chemicals; and miscellaneous manufacture and other items. Does what we teach our children in any way reflect a policy or a distinct effort to prepare our young, such that we are able to steadily reduce what we import by producing some of what we import ourselves; at the very least, food?

Fishing and agricultural production in 1995 was \$66.4 million and \$43.7 million in 1996. Fishing products (crawfish, fish and other crustaceans) are our largest single category of exports; but a great number of Bahamians don't even know how to swim. With almost 100,000 square miles of Atlantic Ocean known as Bahamian waters, this is an economic area that is virtually untapped. We are reminded of the wealth contained in our waters every time foreign poachers are apprehended for their illegal fishing exploits in our waters. Marine navigation,

fishing, boat building, environmental issues of our reefs, seabeds, and sea life, all specific to the Bahamas, is not found in any substantive form in the formal classrooms of the average primary or secondary school student. In fact, on some of our family islands, truancy is not uncommon during certain fishing periods. As this represents the livelihood of many families, and at times necessitates the absence of younger family members from school, who assist their families in this endeavour, the system in these kinds of instances should be accommodating, and designed to function around certain essential seasons, so that the child doesn't lose out on valuable learning.

Are we teaching our children the lessons that will ensure the continuous favourable growth in our exports, and by extension our economy, with each new graduating class?

The School Psychological Services Division of the Ministry of Education handles the psychological evaluation of all students enrolled in schools (both public and private) in the Bahamas. They are either referred to them through the school system or are simply "walked-in" by parents or guardians. A senior official of this Division reported that of the primary school aged children 90 percent are referred for academic reasons and 10 percent for behavioural problems. Of the secondary school students the official said that approximately 10 percent of referrals are academic and 90 percent are behavioural. The official elaborated that what is happening is that the students who are not able to cope in the classroom early on, are not getting the academic attention that they need; and that later as a result of their frustrations, and being confronted with higher levels of work, having not even grasped the basic concepts, they vent through poor and often times disruptive and rebellious behaviour.

One official said that although programmes, curriculum, etc. may look good on paper,

what actually occurs in the classroom is not always fully representative. Once referrals have been tested and evaluated, there are really only two educational options. Either to return them to the system in which their dilemmas are rooted, or to recommend them to the school for the mentally retarded, the extreme on the end, with no real alternatives in between. All 'normal' schools are supposed to be equipped with resource rooms and active special education programmes, which unfortunately is not always the case. As a result a number of "kids fall through the cracks." They may be streetwise, socially competent, able to help with household maintenance; and by all accounts not mentally retarded, however they do require special education, which is not always available to them. They are returned to a system, in which it is not too difficult to get lost.

The education system is the only single system in this country that has access to our children for twelve consecutive years. In this ever changing world, many children have no realistic concept of things of the day, such as the internet, email, securities markets, biodiversity, ecotourism, environmental health, free trade, Caribbean integration, ... To many students aspire to work for, rather than to do, to make and to own. High enough priorities are not demonstrated on enterprise. We encourage our 'smart' children to go to the College of the Bahamas, frown on choices other than a college education; and tell 'other' children, who by our own standards have failed academically --- along with the unemployed --- whom we lump them with, to go to vocational school to learn how to repair the machines and appliances that we import.

The graffiti on walls and buildings read "murdarars," "siko killer" and the like. One may think that it's all a part of the new 'Boyz' spelling kind of craze which has taken over a

new ‘hip-hop’ generation; but examples such as these have been around long before the fad, and the stark reality is that most if not all of the perpetrators, really just can’t spell.

Unemployment, since 1991 to 1995, has wavered between 11.1 percent and 14.8 percent. We can improve our economy, by improving our educationally opportunities; and ultimately diversify our economy, through a diversified education. We must decide what best to teach our children, in the interest of the future Bahamas, and how early should these lessons begin.

- **Arts and Culture**

To Preserve our national identity while honouring the cultural diversity of our region should be our beacon.

An often asked and seldom answered question is “What is Bahamian?” Though our geographical position has had many advantages, it has also left us sandwiched between very strong and impressionable North American and Caribbean cultures, and beneath the umbrella of a formidable ‘old time’ colonial influence. As they chant rap songs, and chat reggae lyrics, our youth do so without any sense and more frightening without any care of what is and what might be their own. Ours is a culture rich in story-telling, myths, bush medicine and mythical remedies and cures to things from the common cold, to a lost lover. Foods, dance, folklore and rhyme; all elements of ‘things Bahamian’.

Our television is American television, our streets are lined with American and European Enterprises. Golden Arches rise high above the airwaves of foreign music. Our

youth don't have the same luxuries of 'remembering when', nor do they have an interest or an appreciation of 'back in the ol' days'. They grow up with the view that foreign is better, and we feed this way of thinking, when we don't take the proper measures to educate them on who they are, and what being Bahamian means. As a country we have failed to keep record and account of who we are and how we came to being.

In our society of vastly imported cultures, we need to mete out national initiatives that will serve to give youth an appreciation for things Bahamian; a base from which to grow, to evolve. We certainly do not in any way, want to project a foreign - no, domestic - yes, attitude; but to put things into perspective, such that things national, regional and international are understood and that our young people have the capacity to look through each window, and to see a distinct Bahamas in the context of each backdrop.

- **Sports**

The Bahamas can boast of Bahamians who have participated professionally in the National Basketball Association (NBA), the National Football League (NFL), International Boxing, Major League Baseball, Tennis, Weightlifting, Cycling, Sunfish Sailing, Bodybuilding, Track and Field, ... Many Bahamian students have studied, and are presently studying abroad in mainly North American colleges and universities courtesy of various athletic scholarships, in sports including not only most of those associated with the above professional leagues and areas, but also in areas such as swimming, soccer, softball, volleyball. The concern here though is that all of the achievements in athletics thus far have been attributable mainly to personal

drive and perseverance; and through the independent initiatives of a small private minority. There has been no national effort to channel the sporting interests and talents of Bahamians into the most productive vessels. Track and field by spectator standards, is one of the most popular sports in the country; and in the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, it was said that overall and that by ratio of medals earned by a country to that country's population, that the Bahamas with a silver medal won by our women's 4X100m relay team, finished second in the world. The Bahamas government responded by giving these successful athletes cash rewards upon their return home.

Over the years and worldwide, sports has evolved as a major source of income and a vehicle through which young persons may gain the advantage of tertiary education, which through no other avenue may have been available to them. Often recruiters come to the Bahamas sometimes on the invitation of private individuals many of whom are alumni of the various institutions; or perhaps from schools who may have enjoyed the talents of Bahamian 'walk on' athletes; and those schools that have 'discovered' the talent base that exists in the Caribbean. But because these are primarily 'word of mouth' efforts, they are done largely on a small scale and include most often only a few junior colleges.

Adolescent athletes of various sporting groups stand on street corners and at main traffic junctions with cans, bottles and boxes on "dollar days" soliciting donations from the general public. Most of our young people have never played tennis, because lessons are too expensive; but in most recent years we have had players of the small minority that could afford lessons, ranked in the world. Despite the fact that we are an island nation, most Bahamians can't swim; they've never had the means to benefit from the luxury of lessons; but

of the few that have, students are abroad studying at well recognized universities on swim scholarships. In all of our lower income housing areas there are of course public basketball courts and little else, so young men and women that are interested can teach themselves the game, and if even further interested, can vie for the limited spots on public school basketball teams. Access to various sports is solely limited to those with financial means, but somehow even from a pool far from representative of the full Bahamian populace, exceptional athletes have been produced. What if there was equal access?

But even beyond the potential for professional athletic status in various sports, and even further beyond the vehicle through which many have earned tertiary education, is the loss of identification of sports as a means of recreation and as a key contributor to the all around character of the sports men and women. The virtues extolled by many sports and particularly team sports, are not known to enough Bahamians, especially young Bahamians. The lessons that are learnt on various courts, and the skills developed on various playing fields and at certain game boards, are invaluable ones through which each individual can benefit. We must ensure that all of our children learn and hopefully master at least one sport during their developmental years, because although they may not emerge as premier athletes, they are sure to be more well rounded individuals.

The issue is the access of as many Bahamians as possible to as many sports and recreational facilities and activities as possible; to level the field for all of our young people as well as to educate them on certain long neglected sports (cricket, netball, chess, sailing, ...) that are so deeply rooted in our Caribbean identities.

- **Society**

The Youth Division of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture employs a modest cadre of Youth Officers, the flag staff of the Division. One senior official noted however that despite the fact that young people are free really only in evenings (after school) and on weekends, these full time Officers work from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and only on weekdays; and therefore essentially are off duty when our youth are on the streets. Young people need greater supervision and access to far more opportunities for organized constructive activities when they're not in school.

There are a number of private civic and social organizations registered in the Bahamas, however many of them either have very low participatory rates, have not been consistently active, or are not accessible to a wide enough range of young people. The threads of family, traditionally the bedrock of our society, is being challenged daily, by communities that become more and more economically depressed. Families that have been so fortunate to move out of the more financially challenged areas in central New Providence, move to areas farther East or farther West. In instances they've responded by building higher walls and installing more sophisticated security facilities.

Our youth are growing up in a society of rapidly changing norms; and emerging youth leadership in the corners of our communities is not really evident. Many Bahamian youth are likening their tastes and life styles to the far less than exemplary models in inner cities in the United States. It is not uncommon, that children of parents earning no more than \$175 in income, per week, see no reason why they should not be able to wear the latest in sneakers,

clothing, jewelry and so on. In fact in days leading up to the start of the new 1997/1998 academic year, the principal of one of our public secondary schools, pleaded to parents not to outfit their children in various designer products, that would make them likely targets for theft and harassment. Grossly mis-placed values are evidenced in our society where 70.7 percent of crimes committed against persons in 1995 were related to robbery and attempted theft; up from 64.6 percent in 1994.

For the first time in the Bahamas, we are seeing an element of gang violence and gang crimes. Shootings, once hardly ever heard of, are becoming prevalent in our society. Our task is to fight against the possibility of such incidents becoming normal. Although offenders are certainly within a minority, their actions reverberate as if committed by many. In 1995, 5.4 percent of crimes committed against persons involved killings and attempts to murder or maim; and 23.9 percent were sex related crimes.

The issue here is twofold: to instill in our young people virtues that would cause them to denounce anti-social and criminal behaviour; not simply out of fear of punishment or recrimination, but by genuine choice to want 'to do the right thing' or the good thing. The other half is, how do we deal with proven offenders, so that they do not become repeat offenders or career criminals, but contributors to a productive community.

- **Health**

When asked by the Executive Director of the Bahamas Family Planning Association, what are the possible consequences of sex for both young men and women; a fifteen year old female

student answered that boys get AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and girls get pregnant. When questioned further as to whether or not a sexually active young girl is at risk of contracting HIV, the teen shrugged, not knowing the ‘right answer’ to give. While AIDS is the number one killer in the Bahamas, in ages 15-44, and the Bahamas ranks as having the highest HIV positive ratio in the English speaking Caribbean; a group of young people (aged 14 - 20) recently claimed that girls become sexually active as early as 10 - 12 years and boys, 13 - 14 years --- and quite obviously without all of the facts.

The Director also stated that after an average of approximately 800 births per year in the last ten years to teen mothers, that at least half of mothers of first graders were from age 18 to 19 years. We are beginning to see the adolescent children of once teen mothers. A vicious cycle is being manifested, as parents can only pass on to their children , as much as they themselves know. The children grow up, though perhaps socially competent within their own neighbourhoods, socially inept beyond the walls of their home base; and incapable of participating to their full potential in the positive growth of our nation. They are most vulnerable to criminal and anti-social behaviour, and often times themselves become parents too early in their lives.

School psychologists have reported that one way that young women have chosen to rebel, is through their sexuality. Their sexuality is viewed as their greatest --- and in some instances only --attribute; and promiscuity is the chosen compensation for their perceived misgivings/shortcomings. One Bahamian educator and civic activist once said that “a teenage girl in a short skirt and with a pretty smile is more dangerous to our society than a teenage boy with a knife or gun.” Access of youth and young women especially to health and sex education,

and health, medical and psychological facilities, is sorely limited, and needs the comprehensive attention of the entire country.

Kids are having sex early in their lives, and without the full knowledge of the consequences. Even in changed times, getting pregnant is still viewed as the worst thing that could happen, as a result of a sexual encounter. In 1995, 20.6 percent of recorded deaths in the Bahamas, were as a result of AIDS. Of women dying of AIDS in 1994, one third were under the age of thirty, and of men 26.6 percent had not yet reached that age.

Existing programmes administered through the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture

Junior Achievement Bahamas

Aimed at students in grades 10-12, the purpose is to provide them “with practical business experience through the organization and operation of an after school business enterprise.” On average, less than 1,000 participate students in Junior Achievement in a given school year; and oftentimes within the public school system, the opportunity of participation is only offered to certain academic classes.

Youth Enterprise Project (YEP)

YEP was designed by the Ministry “to help youth develop the skills, attitude and resources

they need to become successful entrepreneurs or to succeed in the labour market.” Aimed especially at the unemployed and ‘out of school’ youth from ages 16-22, “the goal of YEP is to promote economic growth, employment productivity, social development and stability among youth enterprise development.” Technical skills, include training in: souvenir craft; fish trap making; silk screen printing; woodwork; upholstery; garment manufacturing; and food preservation. The programme however is designed to accommodate only 120 persons during a six-month period, and the current active enrollment is less than seventy 70 young men and women.

A maintenance subsidy is provided to enrollees for the earlier stages of the programme, which is phased out in later months, when participants would be in full production of their goods and would have introduced them to market for sale. At this point the main focus is on how to run an enterprise successfully. Although the subsidy is intended mainly to assist participants with their transportation costs to and from programme sites, as well as with meals during the day --- before they would have begun income earning activities ---, and is therefore realistically only enough for those intended purposes; administrators of YEP have reported that persons have joined the programme, and have elected not return once these payments stopped. Numbers of candidates are far lower than previously anticipated, by the programme’s end.

Operation Redemption

Inaugurated in 1996, the programme is geared toward providing “opportunities for self-

employment for young men who are unemployed, out of school and are at risk in becoming involved in gang activity or were former gang members.” The principal goal is intended to train young Bahamians in the areas of “attitudinal development, entrepreneurship, landscaping, car-wash and maintenance, home maintenance, and marketing strategies.: The target group excludes most young men in the Bahamas, and the scheme unfortunately has gained the stigma of “just bad boys mowing people’s lawns.” The project as a result has attracted and kept the support of only tens of young men.

Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP)

The primary function of the CYP, has been to assist and to advise commonwealth countries on the creation and administration of various youth initiatives and development programmes, in their respective locales. Its purpose has been defined as working “toward a society where young women and men are empowered to develop their potential creativity and skills as productive and dynamic members of their societies and participate fully at every level of decision making and development, both individually and collectively, promoting Commonwealth values of international cooperation.”

Teens With and Attitude (TWA)

Mainly a live call-in radio show, designed to coincide with the academic year, the programme was started in May 1993 and also encompasses various public fora for teens, occasional special high school assemblies and stage presentations in which teenagers were able to “display their

talents and express ideas, suggestions, feelings and opinions on issues of national interest.”

To serve primarily as a medium of education and a source of information for youth, the programme looked at the promotion of self-discipline and self-reliance among young people; the development of marketing skills; and the provision of an atmosphere for free speech and expression. Although to date the programme has engaged students from 20 high schools in the community, “the programme boasts an alumni body” of only just over 150 persons.

The National Youth Helpline

The hotline intended to provide peer counseling in a strictly confidential environment, since 1993, has attracted more than 100 Helpline volunteers. Unfortunately, the programme has not been able to provide continuous service; its existence is not known to many young people and when operational, the hours of availability cover only a 12 hour span, from 9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Summer Youth Enrichment Programme

Based on social competency, cultural activities and sports, this programme came on stream with the establishment of the Youth Ministry in 1977. Several hundred young persons on summer vacation, have benefited from the programme whose core objectives are:

- “to provide constructive wholesome activities for students during summer vacations;**
- “to provide an avenue to develop marketing skills and on the job training;**

- “to discourage idleness and reduce the number of young people on the streets;
- “to provide jobs for high school and college students during the summer break.”

A Plan for National Youth Development

Goals and Objectives

National Youth Development will constitute a state led initiative, into the promotion of the ideals deemed most appropriate for the positive and full development of our young people. A system dedicated to guide, support, and to uplift our youth; recognizing and respecting them as nation builders, tomorrow's and some of today's community and national leaders, and the shareholders in a better Bahamas, that they are. With this in mind, the goals of National Youth Development will be:

- **to extol the ideals of family, community, and brotherhood;**
- **to reinforce traditional values and ethics;**
- **to teach the virtues of respect, discipline and law & order;**
- **to instill in our young people a greater sense of nationhood: national identity and national pride;**
- **to provide a healthy knowledge of things cultural and historic;**
- **to ensure that each child has a positive adult role model;**

- to provide each child with a window for counsel and advise;
- to offer youth an active role in community development;
- to invoke a greater appreciation for the environment and environmental issues;
- to offer youth job and career guidance, and the opportunity to learn new skills;
- to serve as vessel through which talents may be discovered, honed, and displayed;
- to offer encouragement; and
- to re-claim wayward youth.

By ensuring the equal access of all young Bahamians to the benefits of these goals, the overall of objective of National Youth Development would be to see to the character building and character strengthening of Bahamian young people.

These goals will be met through:

- the expansion and improvement of existing programmes;
- the expansion and improvement of curricula in the formal education system;
- the expansion and improvement of existing public recreational and sporting centres and facilities;
- the identification and utilization of multiple community centres such that all Bahamians have reasonable access to at least one; and
- the availability of diverse programmes/projects such that opportunities for community service, leadership development, skill development, team participation and other activities in line with the stated objectives, are served.

How will they be facilitated?

To borrow a chapter from The National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations of the United States of America: they herald what is termed "Community Collaboration." They define this mechanism, as the process by which several agencies or organizations make a formal commitment to work together to accomplish a common mission. Collaboration, they say, requires a commitment to participate in shared decision-making, and allocation of resources related to activities responding to mutually identified needs. In our context, this will only be successfully attained through the shared vision of National Youth Development. The original Chairperson of the Juvenile Justice Program in the United States once stated: "Our mandate was not to let happen, what all too often happened in the past. That is, each organization scrambling for its own piece of the action, going its own way and tooting its own horn; seeing programs spring up unrelated to each other; continuing piecemeal planning that's not integrated, rather than working for a corporate plan that sees the community and its resources in full perspective; and perpetuating the terrible gaps between public and private sectors with each suspicious of each other." By this token, the only existing facility in the Bahamas with the capacity of orchestrating such a union, is the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. The goals of National Youth Development will best be served through this central agency, that will best facilitate such developmental initiatives on a national level.

Structure: Arms of National Youth Development

· **On school Campuses**

1. A public school of special education, for those with distinct and unusual academic needs. The very limited facilities for special education in the Bahamas is available only to parents/guardians, able to pay in excess of \$1,200 per semester. In our system of public and private schools, families send their children to public school primarily for one reason and one reason only: they cannot afford to pay private fees, on a consistent basis; were this not the case, all Bahamian children would most likely be enrolled in private schools. With more than 75 percent of our student population in public schools, we know that special education is not available to most. On occasion, officials have said that it is not financially feasible to run separate special education programmes within the 'normal' school frame; since those students demanding such attention are in the minority, and most often priority decisions are made based on the relative numbers that they affect. Therefore, this need may best be served, by taking the task of special education out of the hands of individual schools, and creating a single institution to serve the special academic students, of all schools. This way the gulf between a 'normal' education and one for the mentally retarded is effectively filled, and likelihood of losing students in the system due to academic deficiencies is addressed and a perverse cycle broken.

2. Enhancements to current public school curricula such that:

Family life, is introduced to the student earlier (primary school), and with a stronger and,

more practical sex education content.

Foreign languages are introduced from early primary ages, and not later in secondary schools.

Art is designed to include a component of culture, and craft; which would deal specifically with the history of Bahamian crafts, and the use of natural resources.

The subject "Woodwork" is enhanced and designed toward the refined end of producing skilled carpenters by the students' twelfth year.

The subject of Agriculture is revised to include more advanced technical aspects of food growth. The Bahama islands are low lying, flat and are constituted mainly of limestone; our potential for agricultural production, though limited is fair. Beyond the more traditional subject matters of the discipline, we need to begin teaching things like hydroponics, food packaging and preservation; and at the secondary level, we need to begin in detail the subject of livestock, and the associated areas.

Hotel Training, taught at the senior high level, is started in junior high, and should be revised to a subject on Tourism; therefore hotel training would merely be one of the many aspects of this subject. The entire hotel industry should be looked at, including the role and impact of hotel unions. Other components should include, ecotourism, regional tourism, and a look at tourism worldwide.

3. Additions to current public school curricula that include:

Marine Biology

Environmental Science

The Bahamian Economy

Politics and Government in the Bahamas and the Caribbean

Auto Mechanics and Drivers Education

Swimming

First Aid

Technical training, such that upon high school graduation we would have produced skilled technicians, rather than waiting until after high school. There is no reason for example why a twelfth grade student cannot attain at least the first level of certification for electricians: Single Phase Electricity; or Journeyman Plumbing; telecommunications and the like.

Construction.

Fisheries, to include: navigation, marine mechanics, aquaculture, boat building (a modest but potential filled industry), fishing skills and techniques, refrigeration, fish and crustaceans: seasonal aspects, reproduction etc.

In fact there is a strong argument for the introduction of special technical schools and a school of fisheries at the senior high level.

4. The implementation and enforcement of minimum standards in library, laboratory and sporting facilities, in all public schools.

5. The introduction of various uniformed organizations into the public school system. Organizations such as the Boys & Girls Brigade, Boys Scouts and Girl Guides, over the years,

have waned tremendously in activity. Existing chapters exist in small numbers, and mainly through various private schools and certain churches. Such organizations need to be incorporated into the public school system, such that every school has its own representation.

6. Involvement in at least one sporting club and at least one other organization on campus should be compulsory for all students particularly at the secondary level, and during each school year.

7. Presently, students are mainly referred to guidance counselors for behavioural and other problems. Guidance Counseling should be treated in a more positive light, and not necessarily for children with problems. Annual meetings with students on a one-on-one basis with Counselors should be implemented, such that students may discuss freely their progress and their concerns: be they school related or not.

8. Each student should be expected to take up at least one musical instrument in their primary years.

9. Special student athlete search programmes, where students displaying exceptional athletic ability, are assigned academic tutors --- if necessary --- and are registered with a national programme which will assist them in coordinating their training and study schedules; oversee their athletic training; and on their behalf seek out institutions of higher learning offering athletic scholarships in an appropriate academic environment.

- **Off Campus**

1. The upgrade of all public libraries such that they meet certain minimum standards of automation and volume and categories of information. All public libraries should have special after-school reading programmes, where younger children may enjoy story telling, and children of all ages may improve their reading skills.

2. The introduction of a National Museum and Culture Center, that would conduct related public seminars, special exhibitions and performances; essentially a reservoir of history and culture, and a stage upon which the same may be presented.

3. Public Broadcasting. The Bahamas Government currently operates a radio and television station. Its television station has been operational, more than twenty years. The station however, has elected to compete with foreign networks and Cable Television stations, by purchasing foreign programmes from a number of other stations, that are in effect "re-runs." The station famously operates at a loss, to produce local news, a very limited selection of other local broadcasts, and programmes such as E.R., Chicago Hope, NYPD Blue, The Young and the Restless, ... While Bahamians opt to watch the latest episodes, directly on the foreign stations (Cable Bahamas was introduced in 1993), very few watch the public station for reasons other than the local news. The community would best be served through a public broadcasting system that would highlight locally produced educational, social, informational, and human interest programmes; intended not to compete with foreign entertainment, but to present another dimension, not available on non-local programming.

4 Park and recreational facilities. There is a basketball court, on practically every other

block, in the more densely populated areas, particularly of New Providence. Many of them according to some greater plan for park and recreational facilities, need to be re-surfaced into tennis and badminton courts, converted to netball, volleyball courts and even public swimming pools. For the most part facilities in the various public schools, can be upgraded and improved, and open to public use, during reasonable periods, when not in school use.

5. An adult education programme, where fishermen, tradesmen, craftsman, farmers, and other entrepreneurs are given formal teacher training; after which, they will be able to stand in front of a classroom and share their talents and 'tricks of the trade' with students.

- **Direct Community Programmes**

1. **Health Education Centers.** There are large public health clinics, strategically placed throughout the islands of the Bahamas, to enable access. by the wider community. These clinics should serve as National Health Education Centers, such that on a daily basis, there are organized after school activities, inclusive of but certainly not limited to, seminars, discussions, special speakers, classes, projects, etc., that would address the most prevalent as well as other health issues.

2. **Police Community Centers.** As is the case with health clinics, there are large and newly renovated police stations throughout the Bahamas. Every home is within reasonable distance of a station, which makes the police station a likely candidate as a community centre. The stations have a hands-on relationship with their surrounding communities and for the most part know many of the constituents, particularly the youth. A key advantage too, is the

expectation that a safe environment is ensured. Since the early nineties, the government has been revamping the stations to far more community friendly icons. Many of them are home to basketball courts and moderate park areas on their immediate premises. Community programmes should be operated through these policing centres. Communities can be identified by these centres, and intra as well as inter-community programmes and sporting competitions conducted through them. Programmes may include the restoration of buildings, clean up campaigns, beautification projects, tutorial centres, athletic training, reading programmes, craft classes, and others.

Also through these centres, youth arms of existing service organizations can be implemented. Presently, there is only the Bahamas Junior RedCross, however we can benefit from special youth arms of the Salvation Army; the Bahamas National Trust; the Bahamas Air Sea Rescue Association; the Bahamas Humane Society & Animal Rights; and so on. 24 hour counseling and help services can be set up through these centers, as police stations never close.

3. Professional and Business programmes. In conjunction with both the Police Centres and schools apprenticeship and mentor programmes can be implemented.

4. The Royal Bahamas Defense Force Youth Programme. Similar to the American National Guard Youth Program, this programme will serve a twofold purpose. During the academic year, to serve students of the Boys and Girls Industrial Schools, and during summers, to serve others. The Boys and Girls Industrial Schools, are institutions for wayward youth. At their best the schools service rehabilitative and correctional needs, and at their worst, they serve as junior prisons for under age criminals. Through daily classes for groups at the marine base

emphasis will be placed on things like citizenship, life coping skills, discipline, responsibility, community service, leadership, physical education, and accountability. The goal will be to restore and to reinforce certain values, and to instill self-confidence, and teamwork. During summers, the programmes will be available to other students, but without the rehabilitative content.

Execution

The greatest question on execution is probably who? For the most part, the participants are already there, the youth; and so are many of the coordinators. Youth Officers, Social Workers, School Psychologists, Counselors, and Health Officers presently all work from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; shifts can be implemented, times staggered, and persons dispatched to various centers. Nurses, Doctors and Police are already assigned around 24 hour periods, further redesignation can be carried out.

As part of requirements for graduation, all College of the Bahamas students must take a class called Student Development Seminar. This class requires some form of community participation which is not ideally developed. Such participation can be structured within a formal Youth Development framework. Schemes can be devised where government student loans are repaid in service; or where scholarship recipients are expected to give a certain number of hours once they would have returned home after their studies. Employment of student athletes abroad for sporting programmes, during summers and holidays.

It is hoped of course that persons would see these programmes, in light of a fulfillment of a

greater civic duty, or would see the end being an improved community and would volunteer time and resources. Although given our tax structure which does not include an income tax system, we would not be able to enjoy the related tax deduction that charitable donations bring about; however small incentives can be offered by way of reduced business and professional license fees, property and import tax incentives (individual customs exemptions). And perhaps in instances increased subsidies, particularly to pensioners and retired persons.

Conclusion

Among the virtues of youth, are enthusiasm, idealism, desire and excitement. Along with youth comes a strong conviction and a great sense of commitment and loyalty, when something is deemed a worthy cause. When young believe in a thing, they stand tall with that thing. The best thing in the world that we can give them to believe in, is themselves. They are dreamers, its a gift of youth; if we help them to realize their full potential, we would have set them on their way to realizing their dreams.

National Youth Development is necessary. For better people, for better communities, for better nations; we must better the conditions of, and the opportunities for our youth.

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