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V. LAND REFORM, LAND USE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Workshop agreed to discuss the topic within the following framework:

- (a) Objectives of Economic Development
- (b) Whether the present system allowed for attainment of these objectives; and,
- (c) If not, how do we achieve these objectives - by making marginal improvements on the current system or by fundamental changes in the system. To be borne in mind was the question of time - how fast could the objectives be achieved within either approach.

Objectives

An overall objective of economic development in the region was identified as: improvement in the quality of life within the framework of an integrated economy.

Means to achieve this overall objective, themselves, intermediate objectives were identified:

- (a) improved nutritional standards;
- (b) higher incomes;
- (c) greater employment
- (d) increased linkages within the economy
- (e) optimal land utilisation.

It was felt that the present system of land utilisation was one in which the Caribbean economies were operating unsatisfactorily relative to the objectives outlined. Cited evidence included:

- (a) A relatively undeveloped and disorganised production of food for people in the Caribbean;
- (b) Following from this, the high level of food import bills;
- (c) High levels of unemployment in the economies;
- (d) Continued domination of export agriculture;
- (e) The unequal distribution of land among the people;
- (f) Competition for land between agriculture and other economic activities - tourism, housing, roads etc. This made for soaring land prices and the ultimate contraction of land available to Agriculture.

Improvements or Fundamental Change for Achieving the Objectives

A first general recognition was that of the paucity and even absence of resource inventories or any statistical material of the type conducive to policy decisions. That this should be put right was considered a basic need. For example, land capability studies should have both physical and econometric content. Some territories have already initiated such studies.

It was observed that at least in certain countries in the region, areas of unused or underused land existed and could be used towards achieving the objectives stated. It was felt that the availability of such land provided scope for: production of nutritious food for consumption by local people, continued export production, and other economic activity. The consensus was that it was not absolutely necessary to remove the staple export crops, but that it was absolutely vital that the plantation - minifundia dichotomy - needed radical changes. The concern was not so much with the production of export crops per se so much as it was with the need for changes in structural reorganisation.

The use of any land acquired by Government should be subject to certain conditions: (See Buckmire's paper).

- (a) Zoning land to delineate areas for given activities. This should include some cost benefit calculus of alternative land use with consideration of private vs. social economy.

- (b) Progressive taxation over a given period for failure to utilize as prescribed a given percentage of land with ultimate repossession at the end of the period.
- (c) Ultimate power of the Government to recover land even if it is held under (a) a freehold system.
- (d) National and regional plans for the utilisation of land.

These considerations also held in relation to privately owned land particularly that Government was ultimately responsible for the use of their resources. This requirement could be written into land laws and need be effectively implemented.

It was stated that in certain countries - Jamaica, Trinidad and Belize, that steps in these directions had already been taken, though their effective implementation had not been sufficiently rapid to achieve the objective stated within a reasonable time. The urgency for effective implementation in certain countries might necessitate fundamental changes in the system.

In an overall sense, cognisance was taken of obstacles towards the achievements of the goals stated.

- (a) The philosophical outlook of Caribbean peoples which have permitted our accepted laissez-faire development.
- (b) Vested interests.

Given an urgency for effective implementation of policies geared towards obtaining the objectives outlined, these obstacles warranted effective removal.

In general, it was felt that the ultimate objective of the capital settlement of Caribbean peoples can only be achieved with concerted but harmonious development of all aspects of the economy including settlements, location of industry, tourism, agriculture as well as other activities. Carefully planned land reform programmes could definitely serve economic development favourably, while also attaining optimal land utilisation geared towards desirable objectives.