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Discussion Report

Discussion of Paper Presented by Mr. George Buckmire

The discussion considered the total concept of rationalization as an aid to agricultural development in the Caribbean. Delegates were informed that comparative advantage was not the only criterion on which rationalization should be based, the other criterion seemed to be purely political, as national policies could distort the whole idea of rationalization.

The second criterion seemed to be the greatest obstacle to rationalization because of the enormous difficulty in winning support and commitment for regional programmes over national ones. It was felt that the absence of a comprehensive regional study and a regional plan was an impediment to progress in achieving rationalization in agriculture. Mr. Buckmire proposed that if Governments were presented with a plan, there would be a greater likelihood of their accepting the programmes recommended. This matter was being actively pursued by the Carifta Secretariat, and such a study, it was hoped, would provide a certain framework in terms of making recommendations probably on the types of commodities, the most suitable areas and certainly the suitable size of farms on which these commodities should be grown.

On the question of whether the intra-territorial immobility of capital and people, did not immediately place a very serious stumbling block in the way of agricultural rationalization, Mr. Buckmire stated that the situation applied not only to rationalization of agriculture, but also to the problems of development in the region as a whole, and this emphasized political considerations and constraints. Strategies must be developed to work within these constraints until they could be removed.

Production was highlighted as one of the constraints to the functioning of AMP, and as Governments did not yet have control over production, rationalization would therefore be one method of effecting control. In this connection, the AMP had encouraged the LDC's to increase production while the MDC's were to provide the markets for supplies from the LDC's. Where supplies were not forthcoming, a lack of confidence in the whole programme resulted and the MDC's were forced to go ahead with their own production. The method of production control which Governments employed was through the use of incentives or disincentives to farmers. Therefore, a major contribution to rationalization of agriculture in the Caribbean, would be the setting up of proper production organisations in each territory that would exchange information in advance of production. Governments should not be encouraged to pursue their own programmes of agricultural development since possibilities of trade within the region would be decreased. A political authority would certainly facilitate the implementation of rationalization of agriculture.

Another aspect discussed was the organisational process involved in rationalization of agriculture in the region. Consideration had to be given to farmers and peasants who would be reluctant to adopt new techniques of production. It was decided that the simple solution to this problem would be education, and the starting point -- a planned programme by the Government as an extension service. It would be necessary to start off with the few progressive farmers and expand as the programme continued.

In the steps towards rationalization it seemed a simpler exercise for the LDC's functioning as a group, to concentrate first on those crops for which they already had considerable advantages and leave

the more problematic crops, such as vegetables for subsequent consideration. But there were not too many crops with sufficiently large demands within the region to warrant massive programmes of production, that would give any of the LDC's adequate returns, and there would also be the problem of selecting crops in relation to available land resource.

The discussion proved that agricultural rationalization entailed extensive and in depth study of the entire structure of agriculture in the region. It also had to be related to industrial development, which entailed looking at the possibilities for agro-based industries and the possibility of having agriculture fully integrated into other activities, for example, tourism, and other industries.