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SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF GRAND BAY

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Grand Bay is, without doubt, a typical area of rural under-development: with many people, little or no employment, and limited access to land. The difficulties of transforming agriculture, to make it productive and worthwhile, particularly for the young, are certainly causes for serious concern. It is for this reason, therefore, that the efforts in this study are directed towards developing a strategy for the integrated rural development of the Grand Bay/Geneva area. However, in the little time which has been available to the consultants, a comprehensive blueprint could not have been presented, but the outlines on various alternatives, and a possible strategy, are put forward for discussion. This analysis, therefore, attempts to provide a discussion on the human factors associated with the area as well as the ways in which they presently influence agriculture and rural development, and also some proposals by which they can be organised for the benefit of the people.

For the purposes of the present discussion, and on account of the limited available data, comments will be confined mainly to the situation in that portion of the Geneva/Grand Bay area, considered as the village of Berricoa. It is the most densely concentrated location, and in very close proximity to the estate.

Focussing on the main village of Berricoa, the data shows a population of 3,152 persons, some 1,731 of whom are females, and the remaining 1,421 (45 per cent) are males. Very likely, at the time of writing, some six years after the last census, the population consists of about 4,000 persons (Table 1).

Table 1. Population distribution by age and sex, Grand Bay Village (Berricoa)

	Male	Female	Total	% of Village
Kindergarten (less than 5 years)	305	304	609	19
Primary School Age (5-14 years)	541	513	1,054	33
Post Primary (15-19 years)	133	171	314	10
TOTAL School Age Population	979	989	1,967	62
Young Adults (20-34 years)	157	250	407	13
Adults (35-54 years)	123	249	372	12
Senior Adults (55 years and over)	162	244	406	13
TOTAL VILLAGE	1,421	1,731	3,152	100

Source: 1970 Population Census.

More important than the greater absolute number of females is the relatively higher proportion of females in the 35-54 age group, which has twice as many females as males. One reason that, in part, explains this difference, is the fairly large number of males who had traditionally migrated both out of the village and the country in search of employment. Over the last ten to 15 years or so, the main countries of outward migration were initially the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, the Virgin Islands and, on a smaller scale, the neighbouring French overseas departments of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Recently, these areas of migration and jobs have become almost closed, on account of new immigration policies. During our investigation in the village, it was a regular occurrence to meet returnee-migrants, particularly young men in their late twenties and early thirties, who had become accustomed to 'good money'; and a 'fast way of life', and had now, on returning home, been immersed in a social environment that was stagnant and frustrating. The consequences and potential social impact of such returnee-migrants as *discontented leaders* seems to be of some significance, and further reference to this shall be made later.

With such migration outlets becoming increasingly restricted, one must expect that the village will show an even higher proportion of unemployed young men, acutely frustrated and depressed, who will constitute a potential force for social upheavals. One need not spend any protracted period of time at Grand Bay to encounter the sizeable number of groups of such persons, who do little more than idle their time away between gambling, dominoes, draughts, or casually reclining at the doors of the many shops that dot the main street (L'Allé) of the village.

Even a brief examination of the age differentials in the population helps us to readily grasp a feature of long-term significance for an authentic development of the human resources of the community. It is almost an understatement to say that there is an acute division along age differences. Some 62 per cent of the total village is less than 20 years of age, and 13 per cent more than 55 years. Perhaps even more revealing, is the fact that some 75 per cent of the village can be classified as *young adults and of school age*. It should be remembered that these data were collected in 1970, and are probably conservative estimates of the present situation.

The Grand Bay Primary and Junior Secondary School, an imposing structure built some four years ago, from funds provided by the Canadian Government, presently accommodates approximately 1,100 students. From the 1970 data, it was found that there were 1,054 persons in Berricoa alone, who were in the relevant age group - 5 to 14 years - for attending school. Not only does this indicate the likelihood of a present shortage of school places at this level, but should make us wonder what, in fact, is the present condition of post-primary school-leavers from the village. Our investigations revealed that about 60 to 80 students may be classified as attending secondary schools in the capital, receiving technical and vocational training or serving as trade or craft apprentices. But this still left a sizeable portion of approximately 500 to 600, who were between the ages of 15 to 30, as the main component of rural youth, without access to schools, training, or jobs. It is not difficult to see why these constitute a growing mass of restless youth, perceiving nothing but a bleak and wasteful future ahead of them.

Some general remarks are now offered, to further outline a few features of the demographic situation that should be considered.

Household Composition and Amenities: The average family size seems relatively high, and in the opinion of one respondent, a good estimate may be 8 or 9 persons. The housing conditions reflect a relatively low state, with a great majority of people living in homes that need substantial repairs. There is a general housing shortage, and the present level of congestion would warrant urgent attention. It is said that plans are being considered for a housing extension project, on a portion of the Geneva Estate. While along either side of the main street the houses tend to be more in need of repairs some new construction has taken place in the area called Mabouche.

It was suggested that about 85 per cent of the households utilise electricity, which was introduced to the village around 1963. However, sewerage conditions are very primitive, with the majority of homes using *outhouse* latrines. Pipe-bourne water is only available in a very small number of homes - a guess estimate might suggest about 2 per cent. It is quite a common sight to see all ages of the population toting water containers, from apparently what are only three pipes for the entire village. In the absence of immediate provision of home supplies of pipe-bourne water, attention might be given to increasing the number of general outlets.

Social Amenities: The village has a cottage hospital, consisting of eight beds, and two or three rooms. It was previously staffed by a resident doctor, but presently it only provides clinics by the doctor who visits three days each week. Staffed by two nurses and a dispenser, the centre functions mainly as a relay station to the general hospital, and never admits patients. Medical attention is offered for minor ailments, cuts, bruises and wounds and prescriptions are made for the dispensing of very simple drugs. No such function as public health education is provided on a systematic basis. In general, the health care of the population is in a situation of acute neglect. No ambulance service is available in cases of emergencies. Transportation of the sick in such instances depends on the good fortune of a villager with his own car, or the renting of a taxi at extremely high rates.

Formal recreational facilities are severely restricted. They consist mainly of a playground, located near the agricultural station at the north-western end of the village, and a basketball court in the compound of the Roman Catholic Church.

Although it is said that there are three cricket teams in the village, the condition of the sportsfield indicated severe neglect, with tall grass, and without a usable cricket pitch. The sportsfield is without a pavilion, and the absence of any functioning sports club was a further indication of the low level of appropriate recreation for the majority of young people. The basketball court was intensively utilised, and the game seems to provide great appeal for some of the young people. There are, apparently, four or five domino clubs, as the game is quite a favourite past-time among several of the men of the village,

A highly commendable cultural past-time activity is the operation of a folk-singing and drama group known as *La Jeune Etoile*. It has already produced a long-playing record, and is in search of financial assistance for the production of a second. No doubt, the villagers are noted for musical talent, and one often hears the young people speak with pride of the popular music bands, whose members are or were residents of Grand Bay.

In the light of the general remarks above, attention is turned to some specific aspects of village life. Following this, some suggestions are offered with a view to mobilising the community for integrated development. The basis of the remarks rests not merely on a short period of residence in the village, during which interviews, discussions and a small public meeting were held with the villagers, but also incorporates information from Government and public officials, well-informed about the area, and persons who lived and/or worked there for protracted periods of time. The limitations of these observations are recognised and further sources of data should be utilised to refine the presentation.

1. The Village Economy and Modes of Subsistence

The history of Berricoa is of a rural population, whose livelihood depended, in the main, on selling labour to Geneva Estate, or becoming a small cultivator of food crops, primarily for domestic use, selling any surplus in the market. If this was generally how the bulk of the population subsisted, it does not deny the fact of several medium-size farmers, working family lands, either freehold, or as tenants on a rent or share-cropping basis.

To the extent that this tradition persists, viz., that of agricultural workers, small and medium-size farmers, it should be explicitly recognised and taken into consideration for any development planning of the Geneva Estate. Hopefully, data from the Farmer Registration Programme will provide an empirical basis by which the manpower resources and utilization can be rationally divided.

At the time of this present investigation, it was obvious that a sizeable portion of the male working-age population was unemployed. This was due to the fact that since the 1974 disturbances, Geneva had not been working at the same level it had previously done. Moreover, unemployment is a chronic problem of the entire economy, and one estimate indicated that in 1970 it was about 35 per cent of the labour force.¹

Using the 1970 Population figures, as an estimate of the labour force unemployed, we get a number in the region of 350, between the ages of 20 to 64 years, which reflects 35 per cent as the national unemployment rate. The purpose of this rough estimate is to serve as a guide for the volume of jobs one would have to create in reworking Geneva, if a significant impact is to be made on the major economic problem of the area.

Economic subsistence for some residents is provided by small-scale cultivation of bananas, ground provisions, cocoa, limes, and food crops. In general, these cultivations are hardly above subsistence levels: farmers criticised the lack of proper marketing facilities and the low prices which make production unprofitable. Quite noticeable and pronounced was the general complaint that the cost of production in bananas was prohibitive. Some farmers were able recently to receive fairly reasonable returns from the cultivation of christophene. By and large, the condition of the small farmer is one that is hardly encouraging, and can in no way serve as an incentive for the younger generation, in whose minds it is work which their parents and ancestors have had to endure, at the price of extortion and exploitation.

¹ Sylvester, E. *The Promotion of Agricultural Producers and Marketing Cooperatives as a Basis for Rural Community Development.*

In addition to subsistence farmers and agricultural labourers, a small number of medium-size farmers can be identified in the village, whose socio-economic standing is considerably better. On an even higher economic level are the sizeable number of shopkeepers, a few of whom, about 12 to 15, are seen in the eyes of the villagers as 'doing pretty well'. It is fairly common to find that the shopkeepers do not depend entirely on retail trade as the source of income. Very likely, they will also own or rent a piece of land, on which a tenancy or share-cropping pattern is operated. Also, they might own a few houses that are rented and/or cultivate a backyard garden on their premises.

Some 20 to 25 villagers are employed as school teachers, and another 12 to 15 earn their living as civil servants, sales clerks, skilled labourers or craftsmen.

While a large number of females are employed in household activities, keeping a backyard garden, or assisting in small-scale cultivation, a noticeable number of young women are able to earn some money in handicraft work. This mainly consists of preparing portions of straw mats or basket weaving from the Vertiver or Screwpine grasses, which are grown in the village. This no doubt possesses the potential for a substantial handicraft trade, and further comments will be made about this later.

A fair number of young women were found occupied, as a part-time occupation, with needlecraft, mainly smocking parts of a dress, which were sold to a textile manufacturing concern overseas. The rate of pay for these jobs is minimal, but no doubt provides an additional source of income for a few households.

It would seem that some homes are supplemented by money earned from relatives who had migrated to the U.S.A., Canada or the Virgin Islands.

Mainly, therefore, the villagers rely on working the land, either as labourers or cultivators, as their main mode of subsistence. Conditions today reveal a striking contrast to what several persons recall as a fairly enterprising village, with work available on Geneva, access to land as tenants, with rights to farm and graze their animals, producing a fairly substantial quantity of vegetables, food crops and milk for the market in Roseau. To see their village return to such a situation is a main concern of several residents, in whose thinking the great economic need is 'jobs' and 'land'.

2. Social Status

To understand the relative position of members and groups in the village, if only in a preliminary way, was one of the important objectives of the investigation. Not only was this thought to be indispensable in identifying the leaders and influential individuals on whom the responsibilities for development would be placed, but also knowledge of sources of power and authority will be necessary for the attainment of development goals and to isolate forces which might be inimical to these.¹

¹In the interviews, a self-reporting method was used to collect responses to two questions, which served as main indicators of influence and authority. These questions consisted of the following: (a) whom do you consider to be the three most influential persons in Grand Bay? (b) which three persons in Grand Bay do you think can command the greatest amount of confidence of the people?

Power and authority can be considered as stemming from three distinct bases, economic, political and moral, even if these may not be factually separate in individual instances. It seems that the shopkeepers, as a *quasi*-class, occupy the highest rung in terms of socio-economic status. When this is associated with formal ties of local or national political power, (for instance being village council chairman, or a political party candidate) then such an individual will be sharing two combined sources of status. As a group, shopkeepers are not seen as exercising high moral status.

Of second importance in the power-authority structure of the village are school teachers, hardly identifiable as a *quasi*-class, but comprising a group with moral standing and influence. Of course, older teachers also occupy a position of high socio-economic status, not merely because of salaries as senior teachers, but very likely they would have acquired their own homes, own or work land, and have such sources to supplement family income.

It is important to recognise the emerging influence and power, particularly moral authority and appeal, that some younger school teachers now possess. Three of these teachers, in particular, were frequently mentioned by both old and young villagers as capable and trusted leaders.

At the base of the social structure, one has to place the majority of subsistent small farmers, landless labourers, the unemployed and the young adults, who must be considered as a distinct group, without being formally organised, but sharing similar aspirations and views about the social conditions. Those of low social status tend to have fairly intense feelings of resentment towards the few, highly visible 'better-offs'. Here one finds a clear social division in the village, and both groups utilise stereotypes in dismissing the other. In the eyes of the rich, the poor are 'lazy, unwilling to work, envious of the little we have acquired through hard work' and 'inclined towards disruption'. While to the poor the rich are 'corrupt, they have sucked the people of the village, only interested in themselves', and 'don't want to see anyone else get ahead'.

In terms of age and political affiliations, there also seems to be clearly divided positions in the village. Some of the older heads write off the young people as destructive, bent on disorder and violence, and supposedly under the influence of 'communists'. The political differences would tend to be quite pronounced and cause acute rivalry. At the time of this investigation, several references were made indicating the general threat that the conventional parties perceived in the Movement for a New Dominica (MND). Efforts were, therefore, made to discredit any persons - particularly young people - who were suspected of being sympathetic or involved with the MND. The more important point is that, irrespective of formal membership, a significant number of young people are examining the social, political and economic conditions of their country, in a sufficiently serious manner so as to warrant an understanding of the root causes of the problems. This, perhaps, has given rise to fears on the part of those whose interests are secure within the present *status quo*.

In the judgement of the consultants, no effective programme for integrated development will reach very far without significant participation of the younger people and their spokesmen. It will also seem necessary that coordination of such a programme be sensitive to the potential conflicts across age differences and political affiliations.

Without anticipating subsequent discussion on the recommendations given, it might be helpful to note here that a great majority of villagers agreed on the necessity of having someone of Dominican birth, preferably from Grand Bay, as head of any extensive district development programme, if such were envisaged in the future.

3. Village Institutions and Social Organisation

On the administrative level, the two most important institutions consist of the Village Council, and a recently formed Village Improvement Committee. Discussions with some executives of the Village Council were quite revealing. Being all older persons, their opinions and attitudes tended to reinforce what was said earlier of their resistance to, and stereotypical dismissal of, the young people in the village. One must wonder how effective the Council is, and whose interests and purposes it serves.

The Village Improvement Committee, on the contrary, seems to be more dynamic, with a chairman who is a young school teacher, very articulate and commanding high respect and confidence. For instance, their proposals on the future of Geneva, if even not clearly worked out at the time of this present investigation, should certainly be given some attention, and their participation in strategies for development will be quite necessary.

Some religious institutions can be found in the village. These include churches of the following denominations: Roman Catholic, Methodist, Gospel Mission, Pentecostal, Yahweh Church, Seventh Day Church of God, Worldwide Church of God and Jehovah's Witnesses. Of these, the Roman Catholics have the largest membership. Perhaps more importantly, there was no specific resistance to crop cultivations or animal husbandry that would result from religious beliefs.

The Catholic Church is well entrenched in Grand Bay as in other communities in Dominica. However, its role appears to be passive in relation to cementing the conflicts in the society, and building a strong foundation for development. The Church could assume a more dynamic function, inspiring confidence and commitment as values beneficial for mobilizing a community, and playing an active part in bridging the gap between young and old.

The existence of a Parent Teachers' Association of the village school has not proven to be a source of benefits, either to the educational or professional needs of the students or teachers. No evidence could be found as to what were its plans or programme of activities.

Of course, the school occupies a position of tremendous importance in the village life. Parents are clearly oriented towards their children doing as well as possible. But very few students will receive an opportunity for secondary education. Already, a growing number of young people are forced to endure schooling, then leave, 'half-baked', to use the words of a retired school teacher, and become frustrated and depressed on account of lack of meaningful job opportunities. It will seem worthwhile that consideration be given for utilising the school as part of an adult education programme, and incorporating a significant emphasis on topics of agricultural development.

4. Youth and Their Problems

It was previously indicated that a significant portion of the village is under 35 years of age. In 1970, it was 75 per cent. Moreover, the aspirations of many young people now rest on a level that is outside of likely fulfilment, and this increases their frustration and feelings of powerlessness. They have adopted an attitude and ideology which searches for the political and social factors that make the situation what it is. They are, therefore, politically conscious and want political solutions. Whether these will come through established movements and parties, or violent and spontaneous outbursts, cannot be readily answered.

In the immediate future, as well as for long-term development, organisation and orientation of the creative energies and skills of the present adolescent group must be placed high among the priorities of a development strategy. As mentioned earlier, about 500 to 600 persons, within the 15 to 30 age group, are without training or jobs. It is important that we understand the significance of this demographic phenomenon, both in national and village terms.

Dominica, like several other Caribbean territories, and many under-developed countries, contains a large portion of its population under 25 years. In some instances, it is in the range of 60 to 70 per cent of the total population. Conventional approaches, with emphasis on birth control and efforts at providing more and more schooling, have not proven to be of great success. Not only are the costs prohibitive, but even increased school places and junior technical education do not solve the problems of inadequate job opportunities, nor provide means for improved standards of living and a better quality of life for the rural poor. In general, the search for an authentic way of life by rural youth is hardly satisfied by so-called improvements in school curricula.

Notwithstanding the surface manifestations of reluctance to work, or a so-called general attitude of laziness, it seems important to recognise that young adults require a chance to assume a respected and meaningful role, in shaping the kind of future, and the sort of society they consider desirable.

Discussing problems of rural development, and the effects on groups of rural youth who had received little or no primary education, a study in Kenya indicated, among other things, that:

At any rate the 4-K experience has helped to discredit the familiar cliché that school leavers have a distaste for manual labour and that they only want white collar jobs. They understandably do not want to return to a life of unreformed agriculture, but there is strong evidence that when farming proves profitable, children are very eager to work at it.¹

¹P. Fordham and J.R. Sheffield (1967), "Continuing Education for Youth and Adults" in James R. Sheffield (ed.), *Education, Employment and Rural Development*, Kenya: East Africa Publishing House. 4-K Clubs - designated by Kuunga (to unite), Kufanya (to work), Kusaidia (to help) and Kenya - supervised by Agricultural Extension Staff, provided training on modern farming methods and running projects (e.g., vegetables or poultry) to earn money.

On the assumption of their potential for adult responsibility and readiness to work in situations which are not dehumanising or exploitative, it might be possible to adopt a positive attitude towards the young people and devise with them experimental or pilot projects, which provide some form of apprenticeship, allowing for training and earning to coincide.

While details of such a pilot project must await further discussion and the collection of relevant data, some preliminary observations can be offered.

Two possibilities seem to suggest themselves. One is already the subject of discussions, and seems to be supported by basic commitments on the part of a group of young people. The members of what is known as the Berekua Farmers' Cooperative strongly supported the view that a portion of the Geneva Estate be allocated for their use, as an agricultural producers' and marketing cooperative. Already, an educational programme to understand the principles of cooperatives has begun, and there is contact between the group and staff of the Ministry of Agriculture. However, it will be necessary for specific and concentrated attention to be given, with a view to not merely understanding cooperative principles and selecting the most economically profitable crops, but also to building group solidarity among members, and providing them with a community awareness, by which they might play a strategic role in the village's overall development, as is being attempted at Castle Bruce.

A second possibility might be in the direction of technical and industrial arts, along the lines of a wood and metal work centre, providing training, and at the same time manufacturing furniture for use at the village level, and throughout the country. Considerations on available resources, the cost of production, types of furniture, and marketing outlets will have to be treated in detail prior to any decisions about such a project. (With further thought given to the cultivation of red cedar on the Geneva Estate, a likelihood of linking the woodworking and furniture manufacturing to the use of such resources could require a small local saw-milling enterprise as an additional benefit.)

While the above possibilities would primarily cater to the young, male population of the village, discussions should be re-opened on the feasibility of a Handicraft Centre, utilising Vertiver and Screwpine, which could benefit a portion of unemployed females.

A Report on a Feasibility Survey for Proposed Handicraft Centre, Berricoa, Grand Bay, by L.A. Simon and R.E. Riviere for the Social Development Division, which was conducted in 1969, recommended that:

Though a handicraft centre, per se, may not be the solution to Grand Bay's unemployment problem, nor, indeed, to the social unrest among youth, nevertheless, the human and material factors which emerged from the survey overwhelmingly support the establishment of such a centre.

However, it was not possible to ascertain why this recommendation has not been implemented. Thus, discussions on this matter should be re-opened, and a decision arrived at and implemented.