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REPORT OF WORKSHOP III

Subject: "Cooperative as a vehicle for rural development"

The Workshop saw the need to depart from a consideration of the topic as stated, because it was felt that otherwise the discussion would focus on too narrow a view of the problems facing Grand Bay in its attempts at rural development. In addition, the presence of several individual tenants, with a stated hostility toward cooperatives on the basis of past credit union experience, made it clear that no single approach would satisfactorily deal with the needs of the people of the area.

The Workshop's view was that the traditional view of development as measured by material criteria such as income, acquisition of consumer goods, level of formal education and the like, should be transformed to include a more qualitative reference to the power relations of the community, as they affect decisions controlling the production and distribution of goods and services. It was felt that man was the central focus of any process of development, a position which the Workshop felt emphasized the need for a new value system which, for example, measured man's worth more in terms of his contribution to the common societal good, rather than in terms of wealth acquired from the society.

Arising from the above, the Workshop agreed upon the following prescription for rural development:

- (a) that it should be a process which will lead to a development of social equality, arising out of a continuing lessening of the differences in the power relations among the various classes in the community; and
- (b) that it should involve the collective control of the productive resources to ensure the satisfaction of the needs of the people.

The lack of control by the people over the major productive resources of land and labour was identified as a major obstacle to development. Alongside numerous acres of idle land, there is evidence of severe food shortages. With respect to labour, the recent treatment of Land Management Authority employees, retrenched from 159 to about 30, highlights the people's total lack of control over the basic resource.

The existing power relation in the society which permits a shopkeeper class to manipulate the community towards its own ends, by applying unscrupulous credit practices is a further impediment to development. The dependency of many Grand Bay people on these shopkeepers for basic foodstuffs lets these *opinion leaders* practise a divide and rule principle, that works to maintain this power relationship, while eroding any attempt at self-reliance and self-confidence.

Bearing in mind the need for joint action for rural development as seen by the Workshop, a major obstacle is conflict between youth and adults. This is aggravated, for example, by the youth's determination to remain free from the clutches of the shopkeeper class, and a further determination by many youth to engage in cooperative work.

The Workshop noted the potential problem of a shortage of production management skills, an obstacle that would assume more prominence when work programmes were initiated.

The Workshop was of the opinion that the rural development process hinged very closely on placing the control of the land resource in the hands of the community. Another critical step was the mobilisation of the human resources of the area, through education that provides the understanding that change can be initiated from within, and needs to be attended by organisation for production. Hopefully, this awareness to initiate change, and realisation of the ability to produce ones own material needs, is the combined step that should lead to a re-ordering of the existing power relationships.

Recognising the present situation in Grand Bay/Geneva, namely:

- (i) the presence of individual tenants on the Geneva Estate alongside the existence of a strong feeling for cooperative production in some sections of the community;
- (ii) the stated intention of Grand Bay to exercise control over the use of the lands of Geneva Estate;
- (iii) the stated intention of Grand Bay to pay rent on condition that there be renegotiation of the terms of sale of the Geneva lands;
- (iv) the need to redress the severe unemployment in the area; and
- (v) the realisation that the implementation and success of any plan depends upon the understanding and cooperation of the Grand Bay people,

the Workshop recommended the following strategy: the formation of a Grand Bay Development Committee, comprised of representatives of leaseholders, cooperative and collective groups of Grand Bay, with the following terms of reference:

- (i) arrangement of transfer of ownership of Geneva Estate from the Land Management Authority to the Committee, and the renegotiation of the terms of sale of the Estate;
- (ii) the preparation of a comprehensive development programme for the area, which would form the basis of the dialogue within the community to ensure full involvement by the people in its final formulation; and
- (iii) the establishment of a continuous programme of education that will raise levels of consciousness in the community, so that rural development at Grand Bay evolves into an exercise of greater self-reliance.

Recognising the existing antagonisms among groups in Grand Bay and the alienation that initiation by any one group could cause, the Workshop recommended that the convenor of the participants in the Development Committee be the former extension officer of the area, Mr. Derek Zamore, who, by all reports, has the confidence of the overall community.

The Workshop recommended that the Agro-Economic Society commit itself to the service of the Grand Bay Community, and other rural transformation.