



Are Caribbean leaders taking the issue of climate change too lightly?

It was Ralph Gonzalves, the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines who boldly posited that the threat posed by climate change is not abstract, “it is not very distant, it is immediate and it is real. And if this matter is the premier existential issue which faces us it means that we have to take it more seriously and put it at the centre stage of all our developmental efforts”. However, Caribbean leaders have opted to focus all their attention on muscling major players within the international system to adjust their unwelcomed habits. While it is of great importance that there is an exponential reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases by industrialized powers, such as China and the United States, in order to put up a meaningful fight against climate change. Leaders within the Caribbean should also be mindful of the grave need for extensive and effective climate change mitigation efforts within the region. It is this ‘need’ that has fueled my unfaltering belief that Caribbean leaders should now make a united decision to dedicate some of their time and resources to aggressively address domestic climate change issues in an effort to steer the region out of its deadly claws.

The Caribbean region is quite vulnerable to the blistering effects of climate change mainly because of its location and its unwavering dependence on agriculture and tourism for economic survival. The region is frequently rocked by severe natural disasters brought on by climate change, including, droughts, storms and hurricanes. In 2014, according to Robert Pickersgill,

Jamaica's Minister of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change, Jamaica lost 2,190 hectares of crops valued at US\$953.3 million because of a widespread drought. In addition, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has been plagued by a series of major weather events. Five of these 'weather events' which occurred since 2010 have caused damages amounting to over \$600 million. Confronted with these alarming facts, it is quite evident that climate change poses a threat to the regions'; populace, food security, major economic activities, notably, agriculture and tourism, and possibly to its survival.

Throughout the years the region has been endowed with financial assistance from a plethora of developed states and international bodies to deal with the crippling effects of climate change and to support adaptation and disaster risk- reduction efforts. However, there has been an upsurge in deafening cries from environment- related bodies within the region that leaders are not doing enough to solve the problem of climate change. Many may argue that the cost attached to fighting climate change within the region far exceeds the monies and grants that the region is furnished with from foreign hands to help with climate change efforts. They may also cite efforts made by Caribbean leaders to address climate change as being sufficient given their 'limited' resources. However, as a national of the Caribbean and as such witness to the 'non- committal' attitudes towards climate change and often times blatant ignorance of seriousness of climate change among Caribbean leaders. I have no choice but to rally on the side of disgruntled Environmentalist within the region.

Making the public aware of the causes of climate change and its debilitating and horrid effects is one of the most salient steps in fighting climate change. However, despite their efforts, Caribbean leaders are failing miserably in this regard. I can honestly posit that in Resource, South Manchester, where I reside, that only a handful of persons are aware of the term 'climate change' despite documented efforts made by the Jamaican government 'to educate' the populace about the causes and effects of climate.

Throughout the Caribbean there is an urgent need for the development of policies to bring about marked increases in, and to encourage the use of "renewable energy sources and cleaner and more efficient energy consumption at household, business and industrial levels". The Jamaica Public Service Company, Jamaica's sole distributor of electricity has made some strides in educating the Jamaican populace about the importance of energy consumption. However, the Jamaican government has failed miserably in educating the public about the need to conserve energy and to utilize green energy sources, such as, solar power.

In addition, poor agricultural practices and deforestation in certain Caribbean states, such as, Guatemala play a major role in increasing climate change within the region. However, there is much to be done in the region to bring about sustained reduction in deforestation and improper agricultural practices. For example, in Jamaica, individuals are usually furnished with information regarding the negative effects of deforestation and reforestation efforts when 'Earth Day' and 'National Tree Planting Day' are approaching.

The growth, prosperity and survival of our region is slowing seeping through the cracks carved by climate change. Therefore, Caribbean leaders need to wake out of their untimely and unwelcome slumber and dedicate their efforts to fight against climate change in the region.

References

Brown, D. (2014) *Climate change an “existential threat” for the Caribbean*. Retrieved on May 18, 2015, www.caribbean360.com

Climate change and mitigation (n.d.). Retrieved on May 18, 2015, from www.mona.uwi.edu

Jamaica drought causes nearly US\$1 billion in losses (2014). Retrieved on May 18, 2015, from www.telesurtv.net