



Foreign Policies of CARICOM Countries: Old Challenges, New Landscapes

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The Caribbean Region



CARICOM Territories in the Caribbean



CARICOM Full Members



Fundamental Features of CARICOM States

- ▶ Small size: Populations, Economies, Land Surface
- ▶ Open economies, Narrow productive bases
- ▶ High Vulnerability to External Shocks and Volatility
- ▶ High Exposure to Natural Disaster Risk
- ▶ Unsustainably High Levels of Debt, Low rates of economic growth

How to understand Caribbean economic development challenges?

- ▶ **Briguglio: Vulnerability/Resilience Paradigm**
- ▶ **Baldaccino/Bertram: Strategic Flexibility Paradigm**
- ▶ **Continuous attempts at economic restructuring, diversification since 1980s**
- ▶ **Continuous pressure to adapt to global economic and development policy shifts**

Contemporary Challenges

- ▶ Graduation to Middle Income status
- ▶ More stringent external environment
- ▶ Reduced access to concessionary development finance
- ▶ In spite of relative, maybe shortlived development achievements, ongoing challenges of limited resources, high vulnerability.
- ▶ Existential characteristics require agile, energetic diplomacy in many forums.

New Geopolitical Scenarios: Changing Global Order

- ▶ More diverse global community resulting in complex strains on multilateral system and global governance.
- ▶ Emerging powers, ambivalence/resistance of established powers.
- ▶ LAC area sensitive zone of China-US rivalry.
- ▶ More opportunities and more risk for smaller players.
- ▶ Can strategies of Non-Alignment serve to insulate small developing state actors from wider international tensions? In their interest to maintain multipolar, open international system.

COVID-19 Exacerbating Impact

- ▶ LAC epicentre of health crisis, but with only 3% of global vaccinated population (PAHO, May 2021)
- ▶ Caribbean GDP decline -8% 2020; -12.5% in tourism-dependent E. Caribbean states (ECLAC 2021)
- ▶ Rise in public expenditure and public debt, dramatic fall in public revenue.
- ▶ Calls to Build Back Better (BBB) egs. Digitalization, education and retraining, disaster risk reduction, more resilient health systems, blue-green economic growth, restructured tourism, strengthened regional cooperation.
- ▶ BBB requires more development funding, changes in development indicators, country classifications.

CARICOM Relations with Commonwealth: Multilateral links

- ▶ Value for small states of presence in multilateral institutions, groupings.
- ▶ Commonwealth composition: Asia-Pacific, Africa, Caribbean/Nth America, Britain.
- ▶ Activities: Political, Economic, North-South development cooperation, South-South and triangular cooperation.
- ▶ Political: Democracy, rule of law, human rights, conflict management
- ▶ Thinktank for small state development
- ▶ Focus on youth, civil society networks
- ▶ Links to OACPS, AU, AOSIS

CARICOM-Commonwealth: Bilateral

- ▶ **Canada:** Key development partner, CDB donor, two way trade and investment, large Caribbean diaspora,
- ▶ **UN-Canada-CARICOM** partnership to spearhead global initiatives towards increased Finance For Development.
- ▶ **India:** Cultural ties, Indian diaspora in CARICOM; trade and investment, SSC focused on disaster relief donations, renewable energy and IT capacity-building, Vaccine Maitri Diplomacy: 500,000 doses Astra Zeneca donated to Caribbean region.
- ▶ **Britain:** UK-Caribbean Biennial Forum, large Caribbean diaspora, British Overseas Territories in Caribbean (CARICOM Associate members), development cooperation, trade. Brexit uncertainties, Global Britain 2020 Document - little reference to Caribbean links.

CARICOM-China Relations

- ▶ Illustrative of limits to regional foreign policy coordination Ten countries have diplomatic relations with China, four with Taiwan. Therefore bilateral rather than multilateral relationship.
- ▶ China: valued international partner, most important source of bilateral development funding for many countries.
- ▶ CARICOM-Chinese trade increased 800% 2002-2019. China enjoys substantial merchandise trade surplus.
- ▶ China partners in implementing social and production infrastructural investments, cooperation via education and capacity building, telecommunications network development.
- ▶ Major Chinese investment in tourism, retail trade, port development, mining, energy, agriculture and forestry.
- ▶ Public health diplomacy via medical equipment sales and donations, vaccine provision.

CARICOM-Cuba foreign policy

- ▶ Cuba, like Mexico, one of CARICOM's most valued regional Southern partners.
- ▶ Relations with four independent CARICOM countries established 1972 when Cuba had limited hemispheric diplomatic links. CARICOM's political support to Cuba valued.
- ▶ Highly structured regional and bilateral institutional structures, processes for cooperation.
- ▶ 2017: Decision to focus on education, health, trade and investment, disaster risk reduction, air and sea transport.
- ▶ Cuba's outstanding contributions to Caribbean human development, aligned with MDGs and SDGs. Medical training and other scholarships (approx. 6000 provided). Cuban medical professionals, teachers and other forms of technical assistance. During COVID 650 Cuban medical workers deployed in CARICOM countries.
- ▶ Possibility of further exchanges in pharmaceuticals, vaccines.

Conclusion

- ▶ **CARICOM's foreign relations influenced by history, socio-cultural links, geopolitics, dictates of economic survival and development needs.**
- ▶ **Growing significance of SSC in international partnerships.**
- ▶ **Growing importance of public health diplomacy.**
- ▶ **Although not discussed here, CARICOM's development diplomacy will be obliged to invest increasing resources in international tax cooperation, the defence of offshore banking and financial services, the campaign to rethink and revise global development rankings and to increase sources and models of development finance.**