Caribbean Partnerships II: Co-Constructing Transformative Economic Policy

Exploring a Heterodox and Feminist Approach

23-25 May 2016, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

SUMMARY REPORT

A Caribbean regional workshop, “Caribbean Partnerships II: Co-Constructing Transformative Economic Policy - Exploring a Heterodox and Feminist Approach,” took place in St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago from 23 - 25 May, 2016. Organized by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS): Nita Barrow and St. Augustine Units, University of the West Indies (UWI) and Regions Refocus, in collaboration with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the CPII workshop convened approximately 40 participants representing Caribbean civil society, ministries of Finance, Planning and Gender, academics, the private sector, government institutions, academia, and regional mechanisms.

Using a “slow thinking” methodology intended to work through concrete proposals and establish a community of both thought and praxis, CPII participants explored feminist and heterodox approaches and together envisioned new, creative ways of working together across ministries and movements. Over the three days of the workshop, participants analyzed macroeconomic policy and globalization from a progressive and feminist perspective, critically examined the landscape of economic development and climate finance in the Caribbean, and strategized towards public mobilization for progressive policy proposals.

A first regional workshop, [Caribbean Partnerships for Economic Justice and Sustainability](http://www.daghammarskjold.se/event/caribbean-partnerships-economic-justice-sustainability/), was held in Barbados in 2015. During this initial meeting, participants envisioned progressive policies and regional partnerships towards achieving regional and global objectives for sustainable development along with economic and gender justice and human rights. Inspired by the conversation, CPI participants called for this follow-up workshop on heterodox and feminist economics, to advance transformative economic analysis and policy-making towards economic and gender justice and to strengthen and rethink partnerships in the region.

* Caribbean Perspectives on Social and Economic Transformation for the Caribbean ([Video](https://youtu.be/KRROn4LAH08))
* Caribbean Partnerships I: Summary

In her opening remarks, Rhoda Reddock, Pro-Vice Chancellor and Deputy Principal of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, illustrated the disappointing outcomes of two decades of public policy associated with economic liberalization and global integration. The region is experiencing crises of criminal violence and increasing gender disparities in economic participation that must be addressed through revamped social, economic, and trade policies, she elaborated. To identify viable policy alternatives to the dominant neoliberal economic paradigm, Anita Nayar of Regions Refocus emphasized the critical need for analytical clarity around heterodox and feminist approaches that address the material needs of Caribbean communities from a gender and class perspective.

Patricia McKenzie, Vice-President of Operations at CDB, framed civil society action and ideas at the center of regional imperatives of environmental sustainability, gender equality, good governance, strong institutions, and global partnerships. CDB supports civil society participation and engagement in development policy-making, she said, towards transforming Caribbean policy for economic diversification, debt sustainability, ecological justice, and fulfilling the new development agenda. Renewed multi-stakeholder mechanisms like CPII are required, Pat continued, to reduce poverty and inequality and to enhance well-being across the Caribbean.

# Fiscal Policy and Debt as Development Issues

Much of Caribbean Partnerships II focused on fiscal policy and how its current dynamics influence policy spaces and debt structures in the Caribbean. Building on Rhoda Reddock’s analysis, Isiuwa Iyahen of UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean stated that the region cannot rely on expenditure rationalization where the social sector bears the consequences of failed neoliberal economic policy. Jason Jackson of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania added that policy space has been foreclosed by neoliberal policies. He also pointed to changes in the global political economy that present new opportunities for heterodox approaches. These include the growing recognition of the failures of World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies to generate economic growth and contribute to development and, on the other side, the creation of new development banks (the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa bank). In this shifting geopolitical landscape, the Caribbean can develop heterodox and feminist policy solutions to the most pressing issues of the region.

* Virtual Teach-in Video #1: Challenges and Opportunities for Caribbean Development Policy
* [Resources](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0By8SvXa6kPM6SGluSjkxSTZHR2c/view?usp=sharing): Co-Constructing Transformative Economic Policy in the Caribbean

The second day of CPII opened with a panel discussion on “Reformulating HIPC [the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative] for the Caribbean,” in recognition of the significance of the sovereign debt crisis in the Caribbean when looking at economic policy more broadly. Ian Durant, Deputy Director of the Economics Department at CDB, illustrated the negative impacts of debt on development objectives, particularly through liquidity problems and financial uncertainty that discourage investment in the region. Complicating this lack of sufficient external funding, severe debt servicing commitments burden Caribbean governments and crowd out development expenditures, he said. To achieve debt sustainability, Ian suggested structural reforms to enhance competitiveness and boost GDP growth, public financial management reforms to enhance fiscal outcomes, more efficient use of public resources, and debt swaps and buybacks. These processes, he asserted, can help open necessary fiscal space and stimulate investments in economic growth.

A lively discussion on the concept of an optimal debt-to-GDP ratio punctuated this workshop session. Referring to Rogoff and Reinhart’s study from 2010, which suggests that a debt-to-GDP ratio of above 60 percent negatively affects GDP, Ian mentioned that ten borrowing member countries of the CDB are above the recommended threshold for the Caribbean (of 56 percent), and four of these countries are facing an acute probability of debt distress. Exceeding the recommended threshold affects the risk perception of lenders, can contribute to increased interest rates, and compounds debt, he explained. The perception that Caribbean countries are unable to repay their debt hinders Caribbean states from raising funds externally and consequently constrains their domestic finances, added Valerie Leon, Director of the Budget in the Ministry of Finance of St. Lucia.

Don Marshall, Director of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) at UWI: Cave Hill, challenged this dependence on the debt-to-GDP ratio. Don suggested that this hegemonic discourse, widely disparaged, actually ignores average real growth rates of highly indebted countries that are both positive and insignificantly different from countries with lower levels of debt. In terms of investor perception, the debt-to-GDP ratio appears to matter more for the Caribbean and other “developing” regions than for countries such as the UK and the US, both of which have debt-to-GDP ratios significantly above the 60 percent threshold yet enjoy stable credit ratings, Don added.

The preponderance of this discourse has shaped the austerity policies of the IMF, through their “fiscal adjustment toolbox” of measures prescribed to countries with high debt-to-GDP ratios. Instead, lending institutions and governments should enact structural reforms to challenge investor perception of lending risk, to enhance competitiveness, and to boost GDP growth to restore debt sustainability, Don suggested. A coherent critique of austerity measures, privileging the micro-level impact and social, financial and emotional costs of fiscal austerity, he said, can help to challenge this discourse.

Marsha Caddle stressed the need to unpack and destabilize hegemonic narratives, and to collectively identify sustainable mechanisms to address high levels of debt in the region. Marsha suggested that civil society organizations, thinktanks, and universities work together to produce knowledge and illustrate policy alternatives to austerity. Building on this idea, Ernesto Kesar of the Movement for Social Justice encouraged collective development of a toolkit, rooted in the social and economic realities of Caribbean countries, to strengthen the positions of Caribbean people in pushing their governments to take up progressive positions within intergovernmental processes around debt and debt restructuring.

* Virtual Teach-in Video #2: [Debates on Debt Sustainability in the Caribbean](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fw0swkrFn3E)

# Gender (In)Equality in the Caribbean

In Jason’s teach-in on gender, labor, and industrial policy, he focused on the “Caribbean paradox” of the gender wage gap: the insufficient correlation between the educational attainment of women and their participation in productive sector. Jason illustrated that despite educational attainment higher than men’s, Caribbean women primarily occupy low-wage service and manufacturing jobs, contributing to a ratio of women’s to men’s earnings ranging from 40 percent in Belize to 63 percent in Barbados. Mariama Williams of South Centre explained women’s relatively low level of productivity as caused by their added burden of unpaid labor and care work. Men-owned businesses, added Judith Wedderburn of FES, benefit from the unrecognized support they get from female partners and family members both in the formal and the care economy. As high levels of educational attainment for women have not succeeded in eradicating gender disparities in the labor markets, Isiuwa and others called for policies to recognize and compensate women’s contributions to the care economy – for example, Barbados’s subsidized childcare program – as well as the impact of gender-based discrimination on fiscal policy.

Further outlining the gender dimensions of Caribbean economic policy, Marsha Caddle of CDB presented an overview of the Bank’s efforts to integrate gender perspectives into its programs. Through two workshops and two years of work, CDB has developed a position paper indicating commitments to include gender-sensitive tools and practices, created a project matrix outlining ongoing or upcoming areas of work towards mainstreaming gender analysis, and brought together a community of practice to generate knowledge on gender, trade, and fiscal policy. Overall, the Bank intends to assist its member countries in increasing productivity of both women and men and ameliorating occupational segregation, unemployment, and underemployment – through achieving policy coherence and bridging the data availability gap.

Through strengthened policy dialogue, CDB identifies specific interventions it can support for the gender-responsive reform of trade policies, export strategies, business facilitation, and related projects, Marsha outlined. This is particularly important due to women’s and men’s varying access to and control over resources, and because of their different roles in both the market economy and in the household. Moving forward, the Bank will convene ministries of trade together with national women’s machineries, NGOs, and other partners, to promote gender-aware national and regional economic policies.

# Climate Finance for New Paths to Development

Participants from across the Caribbean identified the severe impacts of climate change on the region, particularly the damages to infrastructure and tourism revenue. To address these challenges, Mariama Williams led a teach-in on how climate finance can improve livelihoods and lead to greater economic and social empowerment of Caribbean countries. As opposed to voluntarily allocated development finance, climate finance represents obligatory flows of money from developed countries responsible for the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions that have contributed to climate change. The Green Climate Fund, for example, allocates USD 100 billion towards climate finance every year until 2025, Mariama explained. Considering the potential for new flows of money through climate finance, Peggy Antrobus, co-founder of DAWN, raised the question of how and to what extent Caribbean countries can harness this funding to create new pathways to development. Mariama highlighted the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) developed by each country ahead of the Paris Agreement on climate change of December 2015 to define national plans to mitigate and adapt to climate change. In the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the INDCs will guide policies and programs and therefore form a significant locus of policy advocacy.

* Virtual Teach-in Video #3: C[limate Finance and Gender Equality in the Caribbean](https://youtu.be/jwZF8mBL6Yo)

In the discussion following Mariama’s teach-in, Malaika Brooks-Smith-Lowe of Groundation Grenada illustrated the gendered effects of climate change, as women tend to rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. Sandra Massiah of Public Services International-Caribbean noted the insufficient integration between climate finance and fiscal policy, as the responsibility to address climate change often resides within one ministry or department rather than mainstreamed. Sandra highlighted the need for regional mechanisms to coordinate efforts to finance climate adaptation and mitigation as part of an overarching fiscal strategy, to ensure that resources are well utilized. In this vein, Dessima Williams, former Ambassador and current director of Grenada Education and Development Programme (GRENED), proposed the creation of mechanisms across ministries for streamlined and targeted approaches towards climate finance. Further, Shantal Munro-Knight of the Caribbean Policy Development Centre suggested that climate finance should support local-level innovation by promoting awareness of climate change among constituencies and facilitating collaboration amongst civil society organization already working on the ground. Angelique Nixon of IGDS: St. Augustine Unit emphasized the role of civil society and activists in building knowledge, advocating for public policies and funding, and holding governments accountable for the implementation and evaluation of existing policies.

Further, women’s political, social and economic marginalization makes them more vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters. Mariama asserted that climate finance should therefore prioritize women’s projects, in mitigation as well as adaptation. In a panel discussion following the Climate Finance teach-in, several Caribbean activists sharing examples of their work for ecological justice. Co-founder of Fondes Amandes Community Re-forestation Project Akilah Jaramogi testified to funding challenges particularly for mitigation projects, and called for governments to allocate resources to NGOs in the region that educate and engage communities in environmental sustainability work.

* Roundtable Discussion Video #1 – [Organizing for Climate and Ecological Justice](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJTXyLg53WE)

Experiences of Trade Union and Civil Society Policy Advocacy

In a dedicated session on the potential for progressive alliances between the trade union movement and civil society in the Caribbean, several participants outlined their visions for labor, women’s rights, and a progressive future for the region. Malaika Smith-Brooks-Lowe shared Groundation Grenada’s work in bridging policy advocacy, including around gender and sexuality, arts, and education through a community library. As an example of reconnecting with Caribbean history and the legacies of revolutionary struggle, Malaika illustrated the “Forgetting Is Not an Option” cultural memory project. Engaging young people in historical reflection of the Grenada revolution lays a foundation to revision the political landscape, Malaika illustrated. Ozzi Warwick of the Joint Trade Union Movement called on the region to reconnect with its history and to strengthen the Assembly of Caribbean People, to build a truly inclusive regional social movement. David Abdulah, political leader of the Movement for Social Justice, added that trade unions and social movements must together change the relations of power completely, towards new equitable forms of governance.

From the perspective of her leadership of the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) of Trinidad and Tobago, Ida Le Blanc (who participated in both CPI and CPII) highlighted successes and struggles in the efforts to afford domestic work legislative protection similar to other kinds of organized labor. NUDE has succeeded in pushing the state to recognize domestic workers in terms of minimum wage, sick leave, and overtime pay, but is leading the struggle along with other trade unions in Trinidad and Tobago to count domestic work as work under the Industrial Relations Act, Ida shared. Mainstreaming gender within the trade union movement and ensuring women representatives of trade unions access policy spaces in the Caribbean is key, asserted Ida. Echoing this point, Ozzi emphasized the importance of defeating patriarchy and gender inequality by strengthening linkages between progressive forces, and Sandra Massiah of PSI-Caribbean called for a rights-based and feminist approach to permeate the Caribbean trade union movement.

* Roundtable Discussion Video #2: [Trade Union Policy Advocacy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ff-aOy5l_Ko)

# Progressive Partnerships and Participatory Governance

Progressive partnerships, participants agreed, are critical for co-constructing transformative heterodox and feminist policies in the region. In a dynamic panel discussion featuring four women government representatives of gender bureaus and the ministry of Social Transformation Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and Jamaica, participants envisioned the principles and criteria required for progressive and efficient partnerships and shared examples of how working across movements and ministries has supported their work.

Farmala Jacobs, Executive Director of the Directorate of Gender Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda, highlighted her experiences of policy-making and participatory governance. The approach of multi-sectoral partnerships is particularly essential for the work of the Directorate in the absence of a gender equality plan in Antigua and Barbuda, she explained. In collaboration with civil society, women’s groups, UN Women and other stakeholders, the Directorate has developed a national strategic action plan to end gender-based violence. The plan depends on a multi-sectoral approach, applying a human rights framework as well as including men and targeting young people in the process. Farmala pointed to the need to work with grassroots constituencies to shift mindsets around gender roles and to position the centrality of gender to economic and climate policy.

Civil society and government representatives criticized the dominant model of public-private partnerships, for not answering to the people, but rather being accountable towards international institutions and the private sector. Shantal Munro-Knight emphasized the need for progressive models of partnerships that move policy discourses by addressing fundamental and urgent conversations in the region. Such partnerships should be diverse and respect the perspectives of various partners, who together can bring their unique strengths to the table to optimize impact, she argued. Shantal stressed that progressive partnership should use already existing processes to maintain momentum and be flexible in order to avoid one-dimensionality.

# Strategies and Next Steps

The workshop identified several concrete areas for follow-up on the issues of fiscal policy, debt, climate finance, and participatory governance. These included developing a position paper and advocacy strategy to advance alternative fiscal policy solutions to the debt crisis. Rosalea Hamilton and other participants articulated the need to mobilize public engagement in the national budget process through simplified communication tools and workshops – like Jamaica’s [Citizens’ Budget project](http://ilejamaica.org.jm/html/projects/jamaicas-citizens-budget-guide/) – that explain fiscal policy and the structure and impact of debt. Along these lines, Gabrielle Hosein of IGDS: St. Augustine Unit suggested enacting post-budget gender analyses and presenting them as easily digestible documents that can inform public discourse. Rosalea also called for continued regional dialogue and multi-sectorial partnerships to develop fiscal responsibility legislation in the region.

On climate change, participants strategized around engaging with the Group of 77 and China (G-77), the organization of developing countries in the United Nations, to advocate for progressive positions on gender and climate change. Several participants volunteered to provide feedback on a position paper on gender and climate change addressed to CARICOM negotiators within the G-77. A small group formed an initial Caribbean collaborative project on climate finance, to gather information and build knowledge in the region. The group strategy session on climate finance proposed the establishment of a Caribbean Community Climate Change Center, to serve as a regional hub for research and knowledge sharing. Participants identified the importance of regional linkages and local knowledge, beyond technological solutions towards behavior change.

Emphasizing the need to explicitly frame Caribbean Partnerships as a feminist initiative, Peggy Antrobus proposed a project to underscore the value of using the term “feminist” in collective efforts to transform power relations and co-construct economic policy. This project intends to incorporate video messages, social media, and circulation of documents as well as personal exchanges with potential allies in government and across movements.

Emerging from this meeting, participants agreed that regional collaboration and dissemination of knowledge should continue amongst civil society, representatives of government, academics and trade unions. Marsha Caddle invited UWI and Regions Refocus to continue the collaboration with CDB and build from this experience, a commitment echoed by Anita Nayar and Tonya Haynes. Marsha shared that she can continue to explore ways of advancing heterodox and feminist ideas at the Bank, especially through new parameters of gender, trade, and economic governance. CDB is working to support its member countries in bolstering women’s political participation in local government, increasing civic engagement in participatory budgeting (with ILE), supporting CARICOM’s advocacy on debt and fiscal policy, and developing research to support these objectives, Marsha outlined.

Tonya Haynes of IGDS: Nita Barrow Unit shared UWI’s intention to institutionalize Caribbean Partnerships, grounding it within the regional UWI community, across departments and throughout the three campuses. Tonya emphasized peer-reviewed research as an important component of progressive partnerships, to bridge gaps between theory and policy. Towards this end, UWI forges relationships with civil society, grassroots organizations, and regional and international organizations across the Caribbean. Potential areas for CP-related research include the social and solidarity economy, climate finance, reducing the gender pay gap, and rebuilding the capacity for teaching, scholarship and policy engagement on feminist economics. Gabrielle Hosein, who becomes Head of IGDS: St. Augustine as of August 2016, articulated her organization’s commitment to carry on this work, particularly of contributing research in the service of progressive and feminist policy-making.

Moving forward, Regions Refocus will explore cross-regional linkages with our work in two regions: co-constructing climate polices with gender and climate ministries in the Pacific; and recovering heterodox policies from the immediate post-Independence period in Africa, imbuing them with feminist perspectives, and reimagining them in response to contemporary political struggles. At the global level, Regions Refocus can work to increase Caribbean visibility at upcoming intergovernmental conferences, including the [22nd Conference of the Parties](http://www.cop22-morocco.com/) (COP) of the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change and the 2017 session of the [High-Level Political Forum](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf).

CPII concluded amidst calls for a third Caribbean Partnerships workshop in the near future, to follow up on the proposals raised.

* Caribbean Development Bank [press release](http://www.caribank.org/news/multi-stakeholder-partnerships-critical-achieving-caribbean-development-goals) on CPII
* [Photos](https://www.facebook.com/RegionsRefocus/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1729210037336260) from CPII (via the Regions Refocus Facebook page)
* Regional Mechanisms Reader: [Caribbean](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0By8SvXa6kPM6SGluSjkxSTZHR2c/view?usp=sharing)
* Caribbean Perspectives on Social and Economic Transformation for the Caribbean ([Video](https://youtu.be/KRROn4LAH08))