Chapter 9

The Question of The Decade: Is it Feasible for CARICOM to Co-ordinate its Foreign Policy towards Africa?

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Introduction

Once dubbed a paradox by Anthony Payne due to the unique arrangement of a community of sovereign states, the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) is guided by Article 6 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, which mandates the regional body to enhance the co-ordination of member states' foreign policies. However, even with a Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) and a Prime Ministerial Sub-committee on External Relations, CARICOM has failed to achieve one of its integral pillars – the co-ordination of member states' foreign policy. This has resulted in numerous insurmountable tensions, as countries have strayed from CARICOM's scrutiny and delved into bilateral or plurilateral arrangements.

This chapter seeks to investigate the challenges and implications presented, to ascertain the feasibility of a co-ordinated CARICOM foreign policy towards Africa, while addressing the level of inconsistency at a regional level. As CARICOM member states grapple with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for their future economic diversification and transformation, several leaders have considered forging new and non-traditional partnerships outside the hemisphere. This has led

to the establishment of new embassies and joint representations, as well as the utilisation of commercial diplomacy as a key tool to help identify and penetrate new markets. This chapter utilises a content analysis of the CARICOM Heads of Government Conference's decisions over the last 15 years to determine the region's African trajectory.

Furthermore, the chapter seeks to critically analyse these fostered relations' impact on the Caribbean region. It raises several questions, including whether a significant volume of South-South trade has occurred, or if the conditions within the region have deteriorated due to these arrangements. However, it is noteworthy to engage the management of these arrangements within the framework of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). A key question raises concerns about the complementary nature of those countries to the relevance and effectiveness of CARICOM's agenda. Will the expansion of relations enhance the capacity of CARICOM member states to perform effectively and achieve its goals? The chapter seeks to identify potential areas and avenues for greater CARICOM activity and even opportunities to export goods and services to the African market. In conclusion, this chapter illustrates that these arrangements can indeed provide actual benefits for both parties to the arrangements, once they do not inhibit the efficient functioning of the CSME and *vice versa*.

Conceptual Clarification

Defining Globalisation

According to Boxill (1999:232), globalisation entails increased "interconnectedness of people from different nations in the areas of politics, economics, and culture". To Held *et al* (1999), globalisation is simply the movement of people "across regions and between continents, be they labour migrations, diasporas or processes of conquest and colonisation." Dupuy discusses it as a process "of integration of all parts of the world in the international division of labour of the capitalist system and concomitant shift of power" (cited in Meeks & Lindhal 2001).

According to Oman (1994:33), globalisation can be described as a "centrifugal process, as [it is] a process of economic outreach." Martell (2010) illustrates that the process of globalisation is complex as a result of the numerous activities, actors, and dimensions. This is supported by Woods (2001), who indicates that globalisation refers to at least three different sets of forces in the world economy. These are internationalisation (which describes the increase in transactions among states via trade), investment and capital flows, and the technological revolution, which highlights the effect of new electronic communication and liberalisation (Woods 2001).

Globalisation versus *Regionalisation*

Blake (2000) details the argument on the contradictory, overlapping, mutually reinforcing, facilitating, and challenging nature of globalisation and regionalisation. According to Blake, "globalisation and the creation of regional blocs [are] diametrically opposite and competing concepts" (2000:128). On the other hand, Dent (2008) details that regionalisation is closely linked to globalisation and claims that regionalisation is merely the increase in levels of "connectivity, integration and interdependence…on a regional scale."

Dent (2008) further contends that, due to the challenges faced by countries due to globalisation, their ability to survive is based on co-operatively pooling their "strengths, resources and preferences" within regional associations. Dent is supported by Anderson *et al* (2002:151), who maintain that, as integration is vital to the continued existence of CARICOM, "the pressures of globalisation have resulted in an upsurge of new regionalism motivated by the need to integrate into the global economy", thus "…it is highly unlikely that individual member states will be able to meet the challenges of globalisation acting in isolation."

Although regionalisation may be seen as a response to globalisation, it is actually not a contradiction as put forward by Blake (2000), but rather it is "a process feeding the globalisation process" where, in the centre, it is a government's undertaking to exploit the benefits and abate the costs of globalisation.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) clarifies that a strengthened regional position reduces the challenges posed by global integration (ILO, 2004). However, globalisation remains useful due to its ability to connect regions, transfer resources, support values, and provide greater democratic governance options.

Regionalism

With the standpoint that integration remains ambiguous, and regionalisation is being classified as a hybrid, the discipline of regionalism remains complex. Located in the interdisciplinary field of international relations, it covers all levels and actors within the international order. It may be defined as being within states or between states, ideas and aspirations, or policies and plans. Regardless of its defining scope, it has become a pervasive feature of international affairs and is one of several forces "challenging the traditional centrality of states in international relations" (Best & Christiansen 2008). It has even been classified by several scholars as the management of independence, interdependence, or internationalisation. However, what is noteworthy is that all these complexities have driven scholars to assert that "there is no single or simple path of regionalism" (Best & Christiansen 2008:447).

Economic integration has been the current method of facilitating regional integration in the Caribbean. This has historically advanced the Balassa stages to form a single market and eventually a single economy. To govern this form of integration, CARICOM member states have settled on the intergovernmentalism approach to ensure that their national sovereignty is maintained. Intergovernmentalism guarantees a measure of compatibility with sovereignty and regional integration commitments. Malamud and Schmitter (2011:146) advance the argument which has been illustrated in the Caribbean that,

> The initiation of regional integration requires an explicit agreement among governments, and the institutions and competencies that they endow it with initially will have a

> continuous impact on its subsequent trajectory. Moreover, there is a high likelihood that the nation states that agree to such a founding treaty will do so with the expectation that it will protect and even strengthen their sovereignty, not transform it. What happens subsequently, once the process of integration has kicked in and begun to generate its intended and unintended consequences, can be quite another matter.

This gives the reader the feeling that the Caribbean has embarked on this journey with one goal in mind, but along the way, the goal has been multiplied and the methods to achieve these divided, thus resulting in the loss of states' sovereignty along the path to greater integration. Initially, regional integration served several purposes. For the former colonisers, it was a means to decrease administrative costs. For the former colonies, it was a means to achieve independence and self-determination, while for the newly independent states, it was an expression of statehood, the ability to join regional trading arrangements to cope with international and multilateral events. With the evolution of mainstream globalisation in the early 1980s, regionalism took a different twist and became an instrument for states to cope with the effects of this phenomenon. It also presented an effective response to the international arena which called for greater openness. This resulted in the deepening of the scope of regional arrangements (Baylis & Smith 2003).

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism first reared its head in the Caribbean in 1992, and is outlined in the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. Neoliberalists believe that states will choose to co-operate to succeed, as evident with the newly independent Caribbean small states in the early 1970s. Keohane and Nye (1977) argue that conditional co-operation forces member states to keep their promises. In this strand of thought, the principle of reciprocity is the key to states co-operating. However, the institution and framework proposed within the international environment is the regional institution of the CARICOM Secretariat. This secretariat is the administrative

body responsible for keeping the peace between member states, and ultimately becoming the mechanism through which states attain their goals of integration and co-operation.

According to neoliberalists, the biggest obstacle to co-operation within the system is that of non-compliance by the units within the system. This becomes a problem in the area of agreed regional decisions to harmonise or implement a policy or even a regulation. If states opt not to comply, there is no mechanism through which the central authority or even another state could force them to do otherwise.

States will co-operate to achieve positive gains, especially in mutual areas such as health, education, climate change, and regional standards (Baylis & Smith 2001). Although securing this co-operation, the region now must take it a step further and seek to harmonise and standardise these areas to create a level playing field within the CSME. This helps to explain the need to have an effective CSME in the world arena, especially representing the issues of small states. From this process, the smaller CARICOM member states have more benefits within a regional grouping such as CARICOM than by themselves whilst facing mega blocs or superpowers during negotiations.

Overview of the Caribbean Community

Historical Introduction to Caribbean Regionalism

Since time immemorial, the Caribbean has continuously developed regional integration schemes to achieve greater independence and development amongst themselves. This has resulted in several multipronged approaches to integration covering a wide scope. Early approaches from the 19th century saw separate federations between the Windward and Leeward Islands, which were created to assist Britain in administratively managing its colonies. Towards the mid-20th century, the most notable experiment at regionalism was the British West Indies Federation (BWIF) comprising ten colonies. Following the demise of the BWIF, the smaller territories constructed the West Indies Associated States (WIAS) in 1966 to become viable. Upon gaining independence,

these smaller countries decided to rejoin the larger territories of the region to form a Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA), to combat the challenges posed by their small size, undiversified economies, and limited financial and human resources.

CARIFTA came into effect on 1 May 1968, to assist countries in their efforts to expand and diversify trade, ensure fair competitive practices, and advance the harmonious development of Caribbean trade and its attempt at liberalisation. However, during CARIFTA's existence, trade had been skewed in favour of the larger territories within the region, namely Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, with stronger manufacturing and industrial capacity and centres, which thus created additional problems for the smaller territories. By the early 1970s, as Britain prepared to accede to the European Community, Caribbean territories again decided to transform their regional integration efforts into becoming a Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). CARICOM was considered to be the next stage of integration post-CARIFTA, which was only a free trade area as it "did not provide for the free movement of labour and capital, or the co-ordination of agricultural, industrial and foreign policies" (CARICOM Secretariat 2005). The switch to CARICOM was expected to generate greater benefits for its members' national economic development.

Formation of CARICOM

Throughout the years, these small Caribbean territories were forced to integrate as they have become increasingly marginalised in the international arena. Former Vincentian prime minister James Fitz-Allen Mitchell argued that the "Caribbean needed unity not to survive, but to be heard... in the new, global cut-and-thrust order" (Mullerleile 1996:255). Therefore, CARICOM was established by the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973, which was signed by Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, and came into effect on 1 August 1973, after which 11 other territories joined.

Upon its inception, CARICOM was guided by Article 4 of the original Treaty of Chaguaramas, with its objectives ranging from

economic integration via a common market regime to achieving "accelerated harmonious and balanced development" (Treaty of Chaguaramas, Article 4(a)(i)), and foreign policy co-ordination to functional co-operation. The functional co-operation pillar was concerned with the sharing of "certain common services and activities for the benefit of its peoples" as stipulated in the original Treaty of Chaguaramas (Article 4(c) (i)).

At this time, the newly independent CARICOM member states agreed to adopt an intergovernmental approach to integration for the protection of their sovereignty, while functioning as a member of the community. To develop the decisions and policies for the region, there were two principal decisionmaking organs in the form of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM (CHOG), and the Common Market Council of Ministers. The former is comprised of all regional heads of government, whether prime ministers or presidents.

Institutional Governance Arrangements within CARICOM

Regional Governance

Panebianco *et al* (2005) argue that regional governance is a "multifaceted phenomenon", due to the complexities involved in the various models of co-operation agreements, networks, alliances, and partnerships within a region amongst several actors. Whilst Benz (cited in Panebianco *et al* 2005) defines regional governance as "the structures and processes of steering and co-ordination in regions". Barnes and Foster (2012) define regional governance as "deliberate efforts by multiple actors to achieve goals in multi-jurisdiction environments". For the Caribbean region, this definition of regional governance may be applicable due to its characteristics of being a process that is cross-border, multisectoral, holistically encompassing the institutional infrastructure, purpose driven, accommodating states' attempts to exercise power, and making CARICOM not an end.

An important dimension of regional governance, which is of the utmost importance to this chapter, is the "implementation experience" (Barnes & Foster 2012). This dimension provides the following indicators, which are the "level of region-scale activity" and the "level of region-scale activity on this goal" (Barnes & Foster 2012). Indeed, "both of these indicators capture the degree to which a region has institutionalised its experience in policies, structures or organisations, and processes, thus normalising its habits of regional governance" (Barnes & Foster 2012:7) However, it must be noted that, "institutionalising practices or structures does not automatically enhance regional governance. Irrelevant or inappropriate institutions can lock in a region to practices that ultimately hinder regional governance" (Barnes & Foster 2012:7).

Is there a necessity for regional governance? I posit that it is essential to address problems that states and parts of the system are unable to solve alone due to the complexity and multiplicity of issues, the cross-border nature of problems, and shrinking financial resources. This is to regulate monetary and financial systems, to facilitate trade, to settle trade disputes, and to promote collective security.

CARICOM Secretariat and CARICOM Secretary General

Erisman (2003) examines the roles played by the CARICOM organs and the Secretariat and describes them as the "CARICOM policymaking hierarchy [which] involves three main centres of authority and influence'. He describes the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CCS) as the "true nerve centre of integrationist sentiment". At the centre of regional integration, the CCS is compelled to "serve the community rather than the parochial concerns of any of its members" (Erisman 2003:122). Erisman (2003), using Axline's study, states that the CCS cultivates an "ideology of integration" within the Caribbean region. He further maintains that "...the secretariat represents the vanguard of the Caribbean integration movement by attempting to build a regional consensus around measures which will constitute an integration scheme likely to contribute to the development of the region" (Erisman 2003:122).

According to Erisman (2003), the CARICOM Secretary-general (CSG) has an integral role "in negotiating compromises among member governments, often through personal contact and face-to-face discussions with heads of government" (Erisman 2003:122). The CSG represents the leading regional civil servant, fulfilling the administrative requirements of the Conference of Heads of Government.

Conference of Heads of Government

This conference is the ultimate decisionmaking body within CARICOM. It is comprised of all member states' heads of government, prime ministers, or presidents. It convenes twice a year with an intersessional meeting in the first quarter whilst their regular meeting is convened during the latter half of the year. This conference is chaired by a rotating head who also acts as host for the regular meetings (Erisman 2003). Each member state within the conference has a single vote; however, it must be noted that "decisions are made on unanimity which is required to pass recommendations, compliance here being voluntary or binding resolutions" (Erisman 2003:122).

Erisman (2003) describes the functions of the conference and notably mentions that the actual practice of the CHG involves rubberstamping previously agreed decisions. According to Erisman (2003:122), "In practice, however, the CHG often merely ratifies proposals that have been worked out within the Council of Ministers". The prominence of the Council is also highlighted as they are responsible for meetings before the CHG to establish their agenda, which "the prime ministers will consider and usually accept without major modification" (Erisman 2003). This chain of decisionmaking represents what Patterson (2012) considers to be a "political structure with representative decisionmaking boards".

It is important to draw attention to this point – one complication is found in the pronouncements of the country representatives at the council and the conference meetings, that they "...represent their governments and hence may be inclined to give priority to national rather than CARICOM interests" (Erisman 2003:122).

Role of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas

CARICOM's objectives ranged from economic integration and foreign policy co-ordination to strengthening the regional capacities of its members. These are located in Article 6 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas 2001, for the establishment of the CSME. As CARICOM celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2023, the pillars of economic integration have been seen as the vehicle to propel the Caribbean towards the attainment of its goals. Thus, all the other pillars should converge to help the Caribbean achieve this major goal – economic integration. One of the four pillars of CARICOM mandates the regional organisation to make concerted efforts for the co-ordination of foreign policies of member states to create a common CARICOM foreign policy. However, Article 6(h) of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas mandates the member states to enhance the co-ordination of their foreign and foreign economic policies.

The Role of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations

CARICOM has the institutional architecture to enhance the co-ordination of foreign policies by the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR), as well as the Prime Ministerial Sub-committee on External Relations. Article 16.3(b) states that COFCOR shall be responsible for,

> establishing measures to co-ordinate the foreign policies of the Member States of the Community, including proposals for joint representation, and seek to ensure, as far as practicable, the adoption of Community positions on major hemispheric and international issues (CARICOM Secretariat, 2001: Article 16.3 (b)).

Article 16 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (RTC) assigns the responsibility of foreign and community relations to COFCOR, which should consist of ministers of foreign affairs from each CARICOM member state. This organ is specifically responsible for:

1. promoting the development of friendly and mutually beneficial relations among CARICOM members;
2. establishing measures to co-ordinate CARICOM member states' foreign policy, inclusive of: joint representation proposals and CARICOM adopted positions on "major hemispheric and international issues";
3. co-ordinating CARICOM positions within inter-governmental organisations
4. promoting and developing co-ordinated community positions in conjunction with CARICOM organs responsible for trade and economic development (COTED) to enhance the region's external economic and trade relations; and
5. co-ordinating with member states to agree on common positions on third states, groups, IGOs, or other international issues.

Interestingly, Article 16(4) of the RTC states that "only Member States possessing the necessary competence concerning the matters under consideration from time to time may take part in the deliberations of COFCOR". As the last clause of the article, it demarcates that, as much as COFCOR is comprised of all ministers of foreign affairs; however, additional officers of some countries may be invited, and others may not be. This sets a tone that only a select few may decide for the region.

CARICOM'S Track Record with Foreign Policy Co-ordination

While there is no universally agreed definition of foreign policy, a working description would be the pursuit by a state of its interests, concerns, and values in the external environment. This definition could be taken to mean that foreign policy includes all policies concerning external issues. However, there is often a considerable overlap between the foreign and domestic aspects of a country's policies, and it is not always easy to distinguish between the two. It can be argued that all foreign policy objectives are ultimately domestic, since all such objectives in some way reflect internal interests or concerns. Therefore, foreign policy is considered to be

a boundary activity, as it straddles both the internal and external environment.

Within that context, the former Barbadian prime minister Lloyd Erskine Sandiford advances the goals and objectives of the foreign policy of Caribbean states towards African states, which should focus around the following themes:

1. expansion of the national economies and protection of national resources and national interests;
2. creation of an integrated regional economy among Caribbean states;
3. building stronger bridges of co-operation among the states of North, Central and South America; and
4. designing new bases for political, social, economic, and cultural collaboration and mutual assistance between Caribbean and African states (Sandiford 2000).

However, from CARICOM's position, the sovereign power of its individual member states is solely driven by its national interest and capacity. Thus, the co-ordination of its foreign policy is challenged by the views and interests of over ten sovereign states, which naturally are inclined to pursue national and regional paths that are mutually beneficial and sometimes convergent.

Deputy Secretary General of CARICOM Lolita Applewhaite remarked at the 14th Meeting of the COFCOR in 2011 that "one of the main weapons in the Community's diplomatic arsenal was that of a co-ordinated foreign policy". As newly independent small states, CARICOM member states utilised the tool of foreign policy co-ordination successfully to conclude trade negotiations as a key region in the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) states.

Feasibility of CARICOM Foreign Policy Co-ordination: Implications and Challenges

The goal of a country's foreign policy lies in its pursuit of its national interest in the international arena. This national interest is simply the "goals that states pursue to maximise what is selfishly best for themselves" (Kegley & Wittkopf 1999:10). This chapter argues that regional foreign policy should ultimately be

indicative of its interest within the hemisphere and international arena. Thus, this is determined by the current policymakers, which can range from security, welfare, survival, or even defence issues (Evans & Newnham 1998).

For foreign policies to be constructed, there are some decisionmaking models that states must follow. The most popular of these models is the Rational Actor Model (RAM), in which decision-makers calculate the costs *vs* benefits, or the risks involved, and then choose the most beneficial path (Goldstein 2001:166). This model can also be used to assess the actions of the opposition.

To completely understand decision-makers, one must analyse or rather appreciate a person's cognition and operational code which basically comprises the personal characteristics determining their behaviour, how the individual perceives, interprets and learns, as well as past experiences influencing their behaviour. According to Alexander George, (cited in Neack 2003:63), a leader's operational code is "the leader's beliefs about the nature of politics and political conflict, his views regarding the extent to which historical developments can be shaped, and his notion of correct strategy and tactics".

Neack (2003:64-5) believes that, with a clear articulation of a leader's beliefs about the world, "these beliefs can be matched against the leader's real foreign policy decision and behaviour in order to elaborate his or her instrumental beliefs". For an additional understanding, it is essential to acknowledge the individual motivations about foreign policy making. That is, how interested are they in foreign policy? It also becomes vital to understand the level of their education in foreign policy, which constitutes their socialisation into the position and the nature of the foreign policy climate, as well as the international system. Hermann and Hermann (1980) maintain that if the levels are low, it equates to "political and personal predispositions in decision-making". But the larger question remains: ow is this to operate on a regional scale with 14 independent countries in various geographic regions within the Caribbean Sea, in Central or South America?

CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME)

History and Development of the CSME

Twenty-seven years after the commencement of the regional independence movement, CARICOM heads of government at the 10th Meeting of the Conference at Grand Anse, Grenada in 1989, agreed to deepen the integration process by conceptualising a regional single market and economy. This was to be achieved "in the shortest possible time" with the hope of strengthening the regional community to respond to the challenges and opportunities posed by the changing neoliberal international environment (Hall & Chuck-a-Sang 2012:21).

Another key decision made in 1989 was to allow for the establishment of an independently managed West Indian Commission (WIC) to advance the goals as stated in the Treaty of Chaguaramas. By 1992, the report of the West Indian Commission diagnosed CARICOM as suffering from "an implementation paralysis", which was then viewed as a "chronic CARICOM deficiency". One of the main recommendations was to establish a single market and economy, similar to the EU's regional integration.

This situation was further compounded by the threat of losing preferential markets, diminishing growth rates, an exodus of regional citizens in search of a better life and uncompetitive manufacturing sectors. Thus, former prime minister of Barbados, Owen S Arthur, aptly described the CSME as the "unique and strategic tool for CARICOM whilst we attempt to reposition our economies to compete effectively in a globalising world" (Arthur 2004). Hence, it was envisaged that the CSME would assist CARICOM in achieving its goals ranging from improving national standards of living to increasing levels of employment and achieving comprehensive development.

In essence, the CSME can be simply deconstructed into the CARICOM Single Market and Economy. The former's main feature is the enabling of the free movement of labour, services, and capital throughout CARICOM member states in order to create a single, large economic space. The single economy would comprise

integrated capital markets, harmonised fiscal incentives, fiscal policy harmonisation, as well as co-ordinated interest and foreign exchange rate policies throughout CARICOM.

To accommodate this new regime, in 2003, the Rose Hall Declaration[1] provided several options for regional governance within a mature regionalism framework. This framework de-emphasised national sovereignty and recognised the centralised authorities as being responsible for decisions. Following this, in 2005, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) was established. In its original jurisdiction, the CCJ is responsible for the application and interpretation of the RTC and any disputes arising from it. The CCJ also has an appellate jurisdiction, in which it hears and determines appeals from common law court matters within the jurisdictions of member states, which are party to the CCJ agreement.

Following a strict programme for the removal of restrictions, member states agreed to launch the CSME in 2006. The CSM was prioritised, with the CSME to follow between 2008 and 2015. The leaders of Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago ratified the treaty and started the operationalisation of the CSM upon signing the declaration of compliance with the CSM on 30 January 2006 in Kingston, Jamaica.

Governance Structure of the CSME

With the advent of the new regional integration initiative, CARICOM decided to utilise its existing framework to create, operationalise, and manage the CSME. The CHOG remained at the helm of the decisionmaking structure, also assisted by a prime ministerial sub-committee on the CSME. The regional heads of government are advised by a CSME implementation unit belonging to the CARICOM Secretariat. In addition, the CARICOM COTED is mandated to oversee the operationalisation of the CSME. Within COTED, a country's delegation comprises the minister responsible for trade, assisted by the CSME Focal Point (CFP).

1 This provides a roadmap for modernising regional integration for CARICOM states.

CARICOM'S Relations with the African Union (2006-2021)

The principal decisionmaking organ of the Caribbean Community, the CARICOM Heads of Government, meets biannually for an intersessional and annual conference. After each meeting of the conference, a communique is issued. This chapter thematically analysed the communiques from 2006 to 2021, to examine the region's foreign policy decisions from the regional prime ministers' and presidents' perspectives and decisions.

In 2005, CARICOM prime ministers agreed to further "strengthen the relationship between the AU and the Community", especially following the AU's designation of the community as its 6th region (CARICOM 2005). The 2005 meeting saw the CARICOM heads extending "warm and fraternal wishes" to the AU on its 5th ordinary session of the assembly. In addition, the community thanked the AU for involving CARICOM diaspora nationals within the Civil Society Advisory Group in the United Nations (UN). The Caribbean has proven to be a supportive partner of Africa, as it continuously supported the South African bid to end apartheid. The regional organisation has continued to ensure that the bonds between the two regions were strengthened. The CARICOM heads also made the point that the two regions shared a similar history of embracing sovereignty while progressing on a "complex route of integration", and a belief that regional integration is the solution to the region's underdevelopment.

The relations between the two regions also saw extraordinary representation when the former prime minister of Barbados, Owen Arthur, as the lead head of government responsible for the CSME, at the 2nd ordinary meeting of the assembly in Maputo, Mozambique, saw this partnership as a "demonstration of [CARICOM'S] commitment to work with the AU to address our common problems and to strengthen our alliance in the face of global challenges" (CARICOM Secretariat 2005). The regions both agreed on targeted areas of collaboration and increasing connections between each other. A call was made for the two secretariats to "explore ways to harness international

diplomacy to promote our mutual objectives in the UN and the WTO" (CARICOM Secretariat 2005).

In 2008, the 29th conference of CARICOM heads discussed the sensitive nature of the Zimbabwean presidential elections and called for the regional and sub-regional organisations to intervene to avoid a worsening situation for the citizens of Zimbabwe and "its harmful effect on neighbouring states" (CARICOM Secretariat 2008). During an intersessional meeting in the Bahamas in 2015, the conference of CARICOM heads agreed to launch national programmes on reparations for slavery, which coincided with the International Decade of People of African Descent (CARICOM Secretariat 2015).

Following another conference of heads meeting in St Lucia in 2019, the 40th regular meeting accepted the proposal to establish a permanent Africa-Brazil-Caribbean Diaspora Commission (ABCD Commission). A special prime ministerial sub-committee comprised of the prime ministers of St Vincent and the Grenadines and Barbados, as well as the president of Suriname, supported by the delegation of the University of the West Indies, was established. Although a proposal was submitted, the extent of this collaboration bodes well for the relations between the two regions (CARICOM Secretariat 2019).

In 2020, the intersessional meeting of the conference recognised "the increasing contact between Member States and African countries" and agreed to the convening of the 1st CARICOM-AU Summit in Kenya. Based on the CARICOM perspective, the summit should assist in "strengthening the relationship" between CARICOM and the AU in the areas of trade, investment, and culture. At this intersessional (2020), the conference acknowledged the increasing relations of the CARICOM member states, prompting the prime ministers of Barbados and Jamaica to visit Africa, while the presidents of Ghana and Kenya visited the Caribbean. In 2020, the CARICOM heads described the visits as a demonstration of a rekindling of interest on both sides to forge deeper partnerships. During the 2020 meeting, the CARICOM heads discussed the weakening of multilateralism and the concurrent strengthening of unilateralism by stronger states

as the only solution for increased solidarity within the developing world and greater South-South collaborations (CARICOM Secretariat 2020).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the successful hosting of the CARICOM-AU summit in 2020, CARICOM heads agreed to pursue a co-sponsored summit with CARICOM, AU and European heads of government. Also, within the 32nd intersessional meeting of the conference, CARICOM prime ministers extended gratitude to the South African Republic and the AU for "carving out an allocation for CARICOM countries" to receive COVID-19 vaccine supplies, via the AU's African Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP) (CARICOM Secretariat 2021).

Conclusion: Reflecting on the Way Forward

This chapter has located the establishment of CARICOM in historical and current reality, reflected on CARICOM-African relations, and identified the pattern of their partnership. As CARICOM member states grapple with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for their future economic diversification and transformation, several leaders have considered forging new and non-traditional partnerships outside the hemisphere. This has led to the commissioning of new embassies and springing up of joint representations, as well as the utilisation of commercial diplomacy as an effective tool to identify and penetrate new markets. To this effect, CARICOM member states have fostered intimate relations with the African continent through several political and diplomatic engagements.

Before the pandemic, CARICOM's engagement with the African countries had been focused on summits (Bardouille 2021). However, there have been bilateral engagements between individual countries in both regions. For instance, there has been the twin-island CARICOM state of Trinidad and Tobago establishing its Republic Bank in Ghana. Subsequently, there has been a growth in CARICOM's relations with non-traditional partners in Africa, such as Morocco, Kenya, and Nigeria.

As the need to chart a new path has emerged, it must build on the extensive historical-neighbourly diplomatic relations

and expand into one that is driven by commercial diplomacy and grounded in enhancing South-South trade relations. This trade partnership must move beyond mere market access and the creation of trade agreements to specific market penetration strategies. This will allow CARICOM goods and service providers to be visible in Africa and able to make their imprints within the African continent. This must lead to the establishment, familiarisation, and expansion of regional brands, from the large conglomerates to the smaller enterprises, in Africa.

Furthermore, it is time that the Caribbean community consider converting the emphasis on foreign policy co-ordination to foreign trade policy co-ordination in its relations with the African continent. This revision of CARICOM's pillar and its focus are both well equipped to insert regional businesses into Africa. It is also a potential win-win scenario since, as a community, the Caribbean could start to explore the possibilities of providing rice, medicaments, and pesticides to key African countries, such as Ghana and Kenya, as a necessary starting point for deepening both foreign and trade relations.

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