

The Caribbean Export Travesty or "Things Fall Apart - Caribbean Style" Part I

Some years ago, during my formative school years, I had to read a novel titled "Things fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe. I must say that it is quite a fitting title for the travesty and abuse of international development funding that I will outline here.

All across the Caribbean it appears that our peoples have lost focus on what is important - **telling the truth, being professional and responsible.**

In fact, the norm is now to tell "**half truths**" - where those "truths" facilitate securing development resources, **being unprofessional** - where such facilitates jobs paying one ½ million US Dollars per year (cash and perks) and, for the most part, **neither delivering the ToRs of one's engagement nor being accountable to anyone regarding your job description** where such is allowed, or sometimes actively supported, by the lax oversight of National Authorizing Officers.

Special mention must be made of the systemic practices of mismanagement of National Indicative Resources at the **Caribbean Export Development Agency (CE).**

CE is (micro) managed, not as a Regional Institution with a mandate for enhancing trade and export development in 15 countries, but as the "personal purse of two Caribbean Nationals. Pamela Coke Hamilton and Chris McNair.

Mrs. Coke Hamilton, Executive Director has incredibly been able to have her appointment as CEO extended to 3 years, **one year in excess of the regulated two year period** (see Conditions of Staff Appointment on the CE website)

Against this background, readers are invited to review everything that I state here specifically as it relates to the past 4 years the organisation's management, what CE has reported on their website **AND** what has actually been happening at **CE**. It will become evident what the **Caribbean Export** has been doing amounts to a practice of mis-stating the actual operations of this organization.

This was not always the case, as the previous management were fair, transparent and accountable validated by (1) low staff turnover as opposed to **30 fired in the last three years** (2) non-existent lawsuits **as opposed to multiple lawsuits notably that filed by Elliott Paige for wrongful dismissal and defamation of character in the Barbados High Court** (3) no employee rights tribunal issues **as opposed to 15 recently fired staff now before the ERT** (4) less conflicts with consultants **as opposed to making awards to consultants who are friends, outside man Selwyn, and unilaterally cancelling awards and giving them to close friends, Selwyn again,** and, most importantly, (5) the historic award of EUR 28.3 million five year Regional Private Sector Development Programme in 2010 **as opposed to 28.3 million smackeroos for certain people to travel weekly, collect substantive per diem yet not produce the customary reports to highlight the success of mission(s).**

I cite the CE sponsorship of the 2014 Calabash Literary Festival in Jamaica which was not an approved EU workplan activity, but a personal desire of the Executive Director. I should also mention the payment for additional rooms at the Shaftesbury Premier London in 2012 for beneficiaries who did not go on said London 2012 mission and CE incredibly not seeking to recover these funds.

Should I mention paying for staff athletics training at the University of the Technology and divvying up the monies among their friends notwithstanding the EUs auditors. Maybe that might account for the recent award of PHd by said University of the West Indies.

What former CE management built, **confidence in Caribbean Export** current management reversed and staff who spoke out to these infelicities, or staff whom CE management did not trust to support them in these “actions of downright theft”, were either dismissed unfairly or forced into retirement over the last three years.

Today there are several legal cases pending at CE with grant beneficiaries, for example **Natural Oils** and a few others cases with contracted consultants like Christine Ferreira of Island Life whose reputation and small female entrepreneur company are purported to have been destroyed by the Executive Director certainly **Selwyn got that contract as well.**

These concerns certainly should raise a few eyebrows with the European Union and/or regional indicative government counterparts since this impacts the integrity of a lynchpin of regional development, a critical entity during this time of shrinking development resources. So why don't they investigate?

These issues should at least initiate investigations of these mismanagement charges but why are there none?

Maybe the answer to such lies in allegations of collusion between the CEO of the agency and The Chairman of the Board. Maybe an examination of this “wild bunch” might bring the issue to the public of the incident of CE’s unauthorized disclosure of Viking Traders financial statements at workshops. This disclosure, to date, has never been addressed by CE despite DG Trade of the European Union requesting numerous clarifications.

Why has the farce of a “**donor visibility event**”, namely the purchase of a Nissan Leaf electric vehicle, one which at the time of the event had the EU and GIZ logos affixed to them, but since then these logos have been mysteriously removed for the vehicle? Yet the Executive Director continues to tell people that “it is her personal vehicle!”

Why is it that CE managers are being sent to CARICOM meetings as a representative of CE, but they after extensive partying the night before, they are too intoxicated to attend to the affairs of the Region? But is this not par for the course when that manager is accustomed cursing and using unrepeatabe expletives to staff during meetings? Does one mention how he is known for destroying chairs, and telephone in the office?

Tell me, does anyone care about CE managers having intimate relations with administrative staff, and keeping them on staff even though they are incapable of performing the CE duties? Does anyone at Caricom care that said managers collude at interviews to hire curvy and good looking females, for future “wuk for wuk benefits”?

How does the CE oversight committee find out about CE management assigning staff to coordinate CE Financial Services event in The Bahamas, and allowing their Administrative Assistant to lay over in Miami to do some shopping? All this for a junior staff member who keeps Caribbean Ministers and officials waiting at the Lynden Pindling International Airport? How is it that the organization is so lax that a CE manager can write a fictitious report for an IT consultant/friend (of the said manager) who is subsequently paid yet no one pick this up?

Where is government oversight that allows an Executive Director to use CE funds to finance a Doctoral/50th birthday party and purchase BBD\$75,000 in liquor?

With those administrative matters out of the way let us examine the parroted response of current management “we have been successful in attracting unprecedented funding for new regional initiatives” but a careful analysis of such funding will expose these empty pronouncements, as only publicity stunts with disproportionate costs for initiatives such as €500,000 for Special Assistance Programme, Break Point, London 2012 (London Engage), Caribbean Soul Fusion, Colloquium, Primed for Success 2, Design Caribbean, Market Intelligence System, Share Point, and the launch of the “Outlook Magazine”.

Further examination of the several costly programme activities at close to 3 million dollars will bring to light the obvious wastage of said funds and will highlight this management team's ability NOT to be “fair, transparent or accountable” far less “successful”.

The question that both the European Union and respective governments should be asking is “if the current administration is so good and efficient in attracting new funding and administering the current donor programme (which by the way, officially ends December 2015,) can it show the real quantitative success of all that expenditure (waste), other than a magazine which features an egotistical CEO talking about her child, in every single monthly issue?

Does this not make one question the seeming inability of respective Caribbean Government Authorizing Officers to reel in these managers and this **“out of control, highly priced, we only fly 1st class, waste”**?

In Part II of my submission I will speak about governments. and supposed **CE** beneficiaries, access to these EU funds and the sentiments that are being floated around concerning this management team and the fact that they have not announced the record amount of funding the organisation is slated to receive under the 11th EDF. (See the Canadian High Commission document attached)

Some will ask why, in the face of all these supporting document, is this still a secret? but others

who are in the know will realize that the answer lies in the fact that CE doesn't want agencies to know about their "double dipping" practice among development resources, because it is under this process that \$\$ can be spent "twice".

Current Management don't want the fact that (1) the management team wrote very bad proposals to donors in North America, who rejected the said proposal for a lack of relevance and not defining its target beneficiaries nor do they want enquiring minds to see the deviation from the **five Pillar Assessment**.

Stay tuned for my next article as I expand on the "**Caribbean Export five pillar assessment**" of 2014 and the prescribed "**seven pillar assessment**" for large funding programmes.