



BAPE position on the South Coast Sewerage Issue

The Barbados Association of Professional Engineers (BAPE) is particularly distressed at the current state of affairs with respect to the ongoing failures at the South Coast Sewerage Plant (SCSP).

Over the years, phenomenal developments in technology and the extremely efficient and effective application of many of these new technologies among the general public, may have created the false belief that these are simple, permanent installations which, once installed - require very little attention and technical expertise in order to maintain viability.

This is a completely false notion.

Practically all modern systems now utilise advanced technologies across multiple disciplines.

So we have created an “engineered world” of unprecedented complexity, but we have generally continued to think that ordinary administrative maintenance, and traditional problem-solving approaches would be enough to keep these complex systems functional.

There are a number of fundamental requirements that must be met if these complex, national, infrastructural systems are to serve the purposes for which they were installed.

1. These assets must be treated nationally as long-term life-cycle investments, with ongoing professional attention being paid to their upkeep and performance.
2. Adequate and appropriate resources must be allocated for upkeep - with the clear understanding that failure to do so will result in massive and unsustainable penalties in the form of system failure, national displacement and perhaps even capital replacement costs.
3. Professional, non-partisan, performance-focused management must be put in place, with ongoing performance assessment and transparent professionalism demanded of them.
4. Depreciation allocations should be provided for, to allow for planned expansion, improvement, and upgrades that will be necessary to maintain such systems in top shape.

This current sewerage failure has become a major national crisis, which must be dealt with as an emergency. However it also presents an opportunity for a full review of our approach to the operation of all such national assets and utilities, including:

1. Our critically important road network
2. Our potable water supply network
3. Our national hospital and emergency services
4. Our electric and telecom utilities
5. Our national public transport systems

In every case, a review of the extent to which adequate attention is being given to the funding, operation and upkeep of these and similar assets - so that crises such as at the SCSP will not arise, is surely a matter of national urgency.

BAPE calls for an urgent, critical re-evaluation of the current philosophical approach that we have been using with regard to the operation of these vital national assets, where all national income is tossed into a 'consolidated fund' from which these critical national infrastructures then have to compete with a range of other (often more politically attractive) projects for scarce funding.

Complex, engineered, national systems must be properly funded, and must be overseen and managed transparently by professional, multi-disciplinary teams of competent performance-driven persons, who are empowered to administer planned, preventative maintenance routines during the life of the asset.

Unless we adopt this approach, the results will continue to be disruptive, embarrassing, and ultimately - much more costly than the "stitch-in-time" approach.

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