

SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND  
POVERTY REDUCTION IN  
LATIN AMERICAN AND  
THE CARIBBEAN

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POVERTY REDUCTION IN  
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THE CARIBBEAN



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# INDEX

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	7
PROLOGUE TO WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS ON POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE LATIN AMERICA..... <i>Guillermo Perry</i>	9
INTRODUCTION: POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN .....	13
<i>Estanislao Gacitúa</i> <i>with Shelton H. Davis</i>	
SOCIAL EXCLUSION AS A DISTRIBUTION THEORY.....	23
<i>Adolfo Figueroa</i>	
THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION .....	49
<i>Carlos Sojo</i>	
BASIC RIGHTS AS A REFERENCE FOR EXPLAINING THE PARADIGM OF CITIZENSHIP AND DEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION .....	79
<i>Jaime Ordóñez</i>	
SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE CARIBBEAN .....	103
<i>Michel-Rolph Trouillot</i>	
RACE, POVERTY, AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN BRAZIL .....	143
<i>Nelson Do Valle Silva</i>	
YOUTH AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN CHILE .....	181
<i>Carolina Tohá Morales</i>	

SOCIAL EXCLUSION, GENDER, AND THE CHILEAN GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY: PRIORITIES AND METHODS IN QUESTION .....	239
<i>Carine Clert</i>	
CONCLUSIONS: POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN .....	289
<i>Estanislao Gacitúa</i> <i>Carlos Sojo</i>	
ABOUT THE AUTHORS .....	297
INDEX .....	301

# SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE CARIBBEAN

MICHEL-ROLPH TROUILLOT

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of social exclusion carries the advantages and challenges of all processual approaches.<sup>1</sup> Its multidimensionality is its richness; but that very richness leaves plenty of room for divergences among analysts on causes and directions of the processes under study. The particulars of specific social formations – not to mention analysts' assumptions – tilt the attribution of causality from markets to institutions to culture-history. To map out causes and directions multidimensionally even within the borders of a single national state is thus difficult. To map them out in a region as complex as the Caribbean is even more challenging. In the case of the Caribbean, two specific difficulties increase the challenge: the state of the existing research and the heterogeneity of the area.

Few writers have explicitly used a social exclusion framework – or associated concepts – to analyze either the Caribbean as a whole, or individual territories within it. To be sure, most Caribbeanists would agree that the region has been profoundly shaped by various forms of exclusion, which themselves have long been privileged objects of study. However, such studies have used a wide range of (sometimes incompatible) approaches. As the Caribbean remains a poor cousin within Latin American studies, the burgeoning literature on social exclusion in the Americas rarely takes into

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1. I extend my thanks to the workshop organizers and my profound gratitude to Clare Sammells of the University of Chicago for her research assistance. The comments of workshop participants and, especially, those of Estanislao Gacitúa-Mario on an earlier version of this paper kindly helped me to clarify many points.

account the area's characteristics (e.g. ILO 1995). Thus, we still lack an empirical bridge that would explicitly connect previous qualitative research on the Caribbean to changing formulations in the social exclusion literature at large. More important, the quantitative data rarely breaks down to the point where they could become meaningful to studies of social exclusion. On the contrary, their presentation most often suggests the homogeneity of Caribbean societies. For instance, beyond demography, it is rare to find figures that express the rural/urban divide, a key feature of most qualitative analyses.

Accordingly, this paper cannot evaluate the literature in a manner that would have been possible if any variant of the social exclusion framework had gained currency in Caribbean Studies, or if the appropriate quantitative data were available. Rather, the opportunity and the challenge here are to bring analytical coherence to an amalgam of data and studies and, beyond them, to the region itself. Thus, data and observations from diverse sources are organized here in an attempt to develop a coherent regional approach. Yet where do we find such coherence? Is not the Caribbean too complex to be enclosed as a single object of analysis?

To be sure, we are dealing with a relatively small number of people – about 36.5 million for the basin as a whole, and 20 million for islands (Baker 1997; World Fact Book 1999). Yet smallness here coexist with diversity. The region includes almost twenty distinguishable social formations, most of which occupy a single island. Further, six major colonial and neocolonial powers – Spain, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Denmark and the United States – have profoundly marked the region, creating social dynamics that have often clashed.

Caribbean diversity expresses itself linguistically, mainly through the four major linguistic blocs inherited from the colonial past – Spanish, English, French and Dutch – and numerous Creole languages. It expresses itself through a medley of phenotypes, human faces that recall sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, India, or China and all mixtures thereof. Caribbean diversity expresses itself also through a variety of institutions and through a range of national statistics that bear witness to distinct institutional processes. GNP per capita varies from under US\$300 in Haiti, to over US\$1,500 in Jamaica to US\$3,500 in Trinidad, which usually ranks ahead of Mexico or Brazil in international economic tables (World Bank 1997:214-5). Questionable as they may be sometimes, quantitative social estimates of health statistics, rural-urban poverty rates and literacy ratios, as broad indicators of complex mechanisms, verify this institutional diversity. Not surprisingly, social, linguistic, ethnic or religious distinctions affect particular Caribbean territories differently. Similarly, economic exclusion does not

take the same shape throughout the region. Likewise, political participation – in the broadest sense – is as firmly institutionalized in some territories as it remains shaky in others. Does it make sense, then, to treat the Caribbean as a single region for the purpose of studying social exclusion?

## A MODEL FOR A REGION

This challenge can be faced if we ground the analysis in two initial – and fairly simple – observations. The first, which is theoretical, concerns the conceptualization of social exclusion as a cumulative process. The second, which is historical, has to do with the particulars of the Caribbean region.

### **Social Exclusion as a Cumulative and Multidimensional Process**

I start with the widespread notion that social exclusion is "the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live" (European Foundation 1995:4). Yet, this phrasing should not hide the fact that social exclusion is ultimately both a cumulative and circular process. That is, unless we reduce social exclusion to instances of discrimination –in which case we do not need a new concept– it can only be seen as the culmination of intermingling of a number of other processes, not all of which inherently cause exclusion. In that sense, what could be call *the generalized process of social exclusion* is best seen as a flow with multiple sources and tributaries, crosscurrents and countercurrents.

A major theoretical issue, then, is how to rank the component processes that cross, contribute to, or stem from this flow. If social exclusion is both processual and multidimensional (de Hann 1998), how do we break it down. Indeed, should we break it down? Here, we face a number of choices. Most simplistically, we could give all contributory flows equal weight, at least at the onset, in which case we lose a lot in complexity and may ultimately dismiss the notion of a cumulative process. At the extreme of this approach, social exclusion would be a mere sum of indicators. Alternatively, we could set a hierarchy that ranks relative contributions according to one or another universal theory, in which case we may ultimately dismiss the notion of a multidimensional process. At that extreme, social exclusion would be like

a watered-down version of class analysis.<sup>2</sup> The choices between these extremes are many.

The solution proposed here is to emphasize both the multidimensional and cumulative character of social exclusion as a process. If social exclusion is a general cumulative process, part of the task may be to identify intermediate dimensions of accumulation within that generalized process. I mean by this dimensions along which we can already see a number of smaller processes coalesce to create widespread trends, which, in turn, will feed into the generalized process of exclusion. I see these dimensions as heuristic devices, not as naturally bounded units, that emphasize smaller yet already cumulative processes within the generalized process of exclusion. Obviously, the fleshing out of these dimensions is in part a theoretical exercise, but the concrete results of that exercise will vary according to the fundamental particulars of the populations under study. What are these fundamental particulars in the Caribbean seized as a single region? To answer that question, we must turn to the complexity of the Caribbean region.

## **A Region Shaped by Exclusion**

The Caribbean region as we know it was actually created by exclusion (Brathwaite 1971; Knight 1990; M. G. Smith 1965, 1984; R.T. Smith 1970, 1987, 1988). Indeed whether our approach to exclusion emphasizes the lack of solidarity, excessive specialization, monopolies of access, or combines these various paradigms (ILO 1996; de Haan and Maxwell 1998), we must incorporate an understanding of the fact that the modern profile of the Caribbean region is profoundly shaped by the exclusion of the majority of its inhabitants.

Here we must take into consideration not only to the decimation of native populations but the rise and maintenance of the plantation system both during and after slavery. For centuries, the plantation system was the dominant form of integration of the Caribbean into the world capitalist economy. That mode of global incorporation required, on the local scene, the exclusion of the majority. Global inclusion and internal exclusion combined to make most

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2. In the first case, our primary emphasis would be national indicators but we would lose sight of the mechanisms behind these indicators. The research agenda would be strongly marked by methodological individualism and policy responses could only target parts without assessing their relation to the whole. In the second case, our primary emphasis would be theoretically secured connections, but we would lose sight of the specific conditions under which exclusion takes form. The research agenda would stress comparative analyses and the extent to which societies fit a pre-set model. Policy responses would be universal without attention to the historical particulars of a society or region.

Caribbean societies surprisingly similar in many ways over time-even if not always in the same way at the same time.<sup>3</sup> The concept of social exclusion thus, it brings us closer to the Caribbean reality than alternative approaches that place an analytical emphasis on individual or group "poverty." One of the objectives of this paper is to indicate how much more understanding we are likely to gain by emphasizing the relations between exclusion and poverty. Caribbean societies were not born poor – indeed, the opposite can be argued. Rather, they were born deeply divided.

If Caribbean societies were at the outset based on exclusion and if the plantation was the original vehicle of that exclusion, it follows that a regional account of social exclusion and poverty must incorporate or address that historical baseline. This does not mean that Caribbean societies are doomed to face a present – or, worse, to inherit a future – preordained by their past trajectory. Nor does it mean that the facts and figures that demonstrate social exclusion today are impervious to more recent dynamics. Rather, possible futures can be envisioned if – and only if – we overcome in the present some of the limitations imposed by past trajectories. To understand current facts and figures as outcomes of processes, we need to look at social exclusion against the background of economic, social and cultural history – all of which include the history of the institutions that generate exclusion.

## **Dimensions of Social Exclusion**

While the plantation system itself now plays a minor role in the region, the processes unleashed by the transition out of the plantation system and the institutional directions shaped by that transition directly affects social structures at the present. Therefore, we need to investigate these processes and institutional directions along three overlapping dimensions: i) socioeconomic; ii) sociocultural and; iii) institutional.

These dimensions recall classical divisions of societies into economic, political and sociocultural spheres. They also echo those outlined elsewhere by other analysts who insist on the multidimensional and processual character of social exclusion (e.g. ILO 1995). Yet the emphasis here is not on economics, culture and institutions or politics as independent domains "out there." Rather, these dimensions are used here as heuristic devices, ways to look at intermediary yet cumulative processes. Economic phenomena play

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3. The insistence of the plantation system as factor of both global integration and local exclusion is what allows us to include mainland territories such as Suriname or Guyana within this analytical framework.

a role in the other two dimensions and vice versa. Indeed, each of these dimensions, as well as the generalized process of social exclusion is characterized in diverse degrees by circular causation. This means that causality crosses the heuristic boundaries used here, often in multiple directions. Indeed, the treatment of the institutional dimension in particular will demonstrate that one cannot clearly separate economic, sociocultural, and political factors of social exclusion.

## **Circular Causation**

In Caribbean Studies, the concept of circular causation has been applied by economist Mats Lundahl who uses the reciprocal influence of land erosion and population pressure to explain increased peasant poverty in Haiti (Lundahl 1979). More generally, in the many domains where it has been deployed (from economics to mathematics and cybernetics), circular causation generally refers to situations characterized by the reciprocal influence of factors, where cause-effect relationships take on multiple directions, where feedback from one area influences another. In abstract, within circular causation theory, not only is there no single or preordered sequence of events, nor any single and necessary direction of causality. It is the flexibility and richness of the notion that make it a useful one to apply both to the generalized process of social exclusion and to the dimensions within it.

Circular causation is key to the social exclusion approach developed here. It applies to the relations between the three dimensions. It applies also to relations within each of these three dimensions. The crux of the approach is that at each of these dimensions, we can see a number of smaller processes coalesce to create widespread trends, which, in turn, feed into the generation of specific exclusion process in Caribbean societies. Policies aimed at ending exclusion must therefore be: a) holistic in perspective; b) relational in scope; and c) specific in implementation, in order to modify the specific factors that are interacting in each case.

There are numerous advantages to this approach. First, in accordance with the theoretical literature on social exclusion, it is inherently multidimensional. Second, as it insists on processes rather than states of affairs, it facilitates the setting of policies that may revert the processes that provoke social exclusion. This approach also emphasizes how particular processes and institutional arrangements produce excluded groups, instead of considering social exclusion as an attribute of individuals (ILO 1996). As a consequence, policy instruments can be targeted to address those nodes.

Finally, and more relevant, this approach allows us to speak of the Caribbean as a whole without dismissing the particularities of single territories. It does not ignore intra-Caribbean differences. Yet it does set those differences within the context of a fundamental resemblance.<sup>4</sup>

## THE SOCIOECONOMIC DIMENSION

The socioeconomic dimension, as conceptualized here, addresses the transformations of the agrarian economy and the mechanisms unleashed by these transformations. In some countries, peasant-based agriculture now provides a substantial share of GDP or occupies a substantial proportion of the population. In others, urban-based economic activities such as tourism, light manufacture, and offshore finance have become predominant. In others the plantation economy still thrives in specialized enclaves. Yet in most countries where industry, mining, or services now contribute to increasing shares of GDP, the majority of the labor force tends to remain engaged in agriculture in the countryside. Further, at the level of the region as a whole, the vast majority of Caribbean citizens are rural. In only 6 countries of the region was the urban population higher than 50% in 1995.

The socioeconomic dimension outlined here reflects both this demographic reality and the economic trends sketched above as manifestations of ongoing processes and indicators of similarities and divergences within and between Caribbean societies. Key to the plotting of this dimension as a heuristic device is the proposition that the dominant processes of socioeconomic exclusion in the region coalesce into the marginalization of the rural populations. This is not to say that all individuals of rural origins are excluded or excluded to the same degree and in the same way. However, the transition out of the plantation economy have reinforced the links between social exclusion processes and the rural/urban divide.

Those links vary across and within societies. Indeed, the overall marginalization of rural populations does not mean that these populations are not integrated in the dominant system of their respective societies. Rather, the marginalization of most rural actors as a mode of insertion on

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4. To be sure, the model tends to analytically favor post-plantation societies more than say, Anguilla, the Bahamas or the Cayman Islands. This is not a weakness. First, territories that did not fully experience the plantation system can be said to have been integrated in the Caribbean as a sociocultural area only to the extent that they served that system. Second, as it will become clear later, social exclusion in the Caribbean reaches its peak in post-plantation societies of various kinds. Third, the vast majority of Caribbean peoples live in post-plantation societies.

the one hand requires their participation in the system and, on the other, guarantees their inability to participate fully in that system. The plantation economy, then and now, posits a rural/urban dichotomy in which both parts are intertwined yet unequal. The rise and fall of peasantry, then and now, only reconfigures that dichotomy. As the populations of the hinterlands (rural workers and independent peasant farmers) became increasingly marginalized, the processes leading to their marginalization as a mode of unequal insertion have solidified. Socioeconomic exclusion even in the urban sphere bears the weight of current and past marginalization of the populations living or born in the countryside. City dwellers of immediate rural origins are caught within mechanisms of exclusion that duplicate in the urban setting the exclusion they or their parents encountered in the rural areas.

If the plantation is everywhere, both by definition and in its historical reality a mechanism of exclusion (Thompson 1928, 1975), then the flow we are trying to outline here can be seen as originating there and in the urban/rural divide that it posits. We can even postulate a gradation along which we read Caribbean societies in relation to that point of departure in two ways: a) how far they have moved from it; b) by what mechanisms and in which directions. This means – and the point is quite important – that not all rural populations in the Caribbean experience or relate to their corresponding urban center(s) in the same way. The organization of agriculture (e.g. peasantry vs. plantations) and the resulting social, institutional and economic structures matter here.

Still, we can see the general resemblance between societies where the transition out of the plantation system led to the rise of an independent peasantry, such as Haiti and the Windward Islands. At the other end of the continuum stand countries where the plantation system never became dominant (such as the Bahamas or the British Virgin Islands) or was replaced with varying degrees of success by an urban-oriented economy (such as Antigua and Barbados), or by an extractive industry (such as Trinidad). Most other territories can be plotted between these two poles, including those where the plantation system retains some significance (such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, or Guyana) or those where mining now contribute to an important share of GDP (such as Jamaica or, again, Guyana).

These broad country profiles do not invalidate important differences between various segments and classes within the rural population of every single Caribbean territory. Even in Haiti, "a proverbial peasant nation" (Lundahl 1995), there are important differences between kinds of peasants (Murray 1977; Oriol 1992). The Dominican Republic, next door, offers a more formal kind of differentiation between latifundia and minifundia, with a very strong pro-plantation and anti-peasant bias on the part of the state

(Vedovato 1986). Internal differentiation within the rural population takes other forms in other countries, not all of which can be discussed here.

Notwithstanding these major differences within or between countries a majority of Caribbean people are engaged in agriculture and live in the countryside, on the other side of an urban-rural divide whose disparities are often hidden by national statistics. Indeed, we can hypothesize that the reality behind these statistics is more alarming than the average figures suggest. For life expectancy to be as low as it is, say in Guyana or Haiti, on the national scale, it has to be in fact much lower in the countryside, given known disparities between town and country.<sup>5</sup>

## Rural Areas

Caribbean rural life is marked by differential access and differential depletion of resources. Socioeconomic exclusion takes the form of differential access to fixed assets (including capital and property), to markets (including labor and credit), and to services (including health and education). It also takes the form of differential depletion of resources (including land and human capital).

### *Differential Access to Assets*

Whether they are independent peasants, miners or plantation workers, Caribbean rural dwellers have limited access to property compared to their urban counterparts. In areas dominated by peasant farms, partition continues to reduce the size of holdings of most peasants. In areas dominated by mines or plantations, ownership of the major means of production is limited to the state or to transnational corporations. Further, in a number of countries, small rural properties are insecure, either because they started out as family land and cannot be formally divided (Besson 1987; Carnegie 1987; Maurer 1997) or simply because procedures set by the state discourage land title registration.

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5. Not to mention the impact of disparity itself on national averages. Evidence suggesting that average life expectancy in developed countries highest not in the richest societies but in those with smaller income differentials (Wilkinson 1996).

## *Differential Access to Markets*<sup>6</sup>

Most Caribbean rural populations also experience differential access to markets, notably labor and credit. On the labor front, there are virtually no competing employers in most Caribbean villages. In plantation areas, the seasonal demand for labor tends to be controlled by the dominant plantation of the locality and plantation management tends to favor workers who come from distant regions anyway (Lemoine 1981; Martínez 1995; Moya Pons 1986). In peasant-dominated areas, the possibility of steady work outside the family farm is nonexistent.

In peasant areas, at least, access to a credit market could alleviate the situation of the self-employed. Unfortunately, credit is extremely scarce throughout the rural Caribbean. Vargas-Lundius (1991) notes that unequal access to credit in the Dominican Republic plagues large and small farmers alike. While plantation management and more successful farmers do provide credit, most often in small amounts and almost always at usury rates, the nearest branch of the national bank (most likely a low-service facility that may not provide credit) may be anywhere between 20 to 50 miles, and covering those distances can take the most of a day given the poor conditions of roads and inadequate public transportation. Further, differential access to assets (e.g., registered property that could serve as collateral) and to finance (that could help legalize property rights) play into one another.

In the absence of a formal credit market, many rural dwellers in the Caribbean, as elsewhere in the South, set up rotating savings and credit associations – ROSCAs (e. g. Kirton 1996). These associations take diverse forms, but they generally entail small regular payments from all participating members, with a different member taking the entire amount each time. The members of each association generally know each other, and the personalized nature of ROSCAs allows them to adjust to members' individual circumstances. Very few joining members are asked to provide any formal documentation, yet default is uncommon due to social pressure. However, given the small amount of cash available to most members, the ceilings for regular contributions are rather low and the total amount available at each turn can rarely sustain major ventures.<sup>7</sup>

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6. The distinction between differential access to fixed assets and differential access to markets echoes Sen's (1981; 1989) insistence on the fact that we should, on the one hand, distinguish between what people possess and what these possessions allow them to do and, on the other, study the combined outcome of these possessions and capacities.

7. A survey of adults from private households in Jamaica (including Kingston, St. Andrew, St. Catherine and St. Thomas) showed that 65% were involved in ROSCAs during 1993, and this

A group particularly affected by the differential access to credit, in spite of its extraordinary economic vitality, is that of Caribbean market women, also called "higglers," "hucksters," or "Madan Sara." It is well known that small internal marketing – especially foodstuff and small consumer goods – has been dominated by women of rural origins since before the demise of slavery (Mintz 1972). Then and now, through very hard labor, they have managed to accumulate some capital at small steps and through risky ventures. Those who have managed to accumulate capital in quantities large enough are, however, equally excluded from a credit market to which their sheer economic competence should give them favorable access. The lack of access to credit makes it impossible for most of them to expand and to diversify.

## Increased Risks

The extreme reliance on single cash or export crops combined with the insecurity inherent in agricultural practices create greater exposure to risk to much of the region economies. Risks include environmental changes, internal economic reforms, economic changes induced from the outside (such as the recent turbulence in the global banana market), internal political instability, etc. An example of the interplay of these different risks is that of the economic reforms implemented in the Dominican Republic in the mid 1990s. Those (ongoing) reforms, included the devaluation of the peso, a huge increase in sales taxes and a reduction in income taxes. While these reforms contributed to substantial growth in GDP rates, they also affected different sectors of the population unequally. The first two measures put an increased burden on the labor force engaged in agriculture who lives primarily in rural areas and does not have foreign sources of income. The second measure barely touched rural residents. Yet inasmuch as it alleviates a duty bore mainly by urban residents who enjoy higher incomes, it also increases the gap between those and most rural Dominicans. Thus, notwithstanding the long-term promises of these reforms or their immediate positive impact on national figures, they can also be seen as confirming and reinforcing processes of exclusion.

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system "was identified as one of the most important sources of finance for low-income persons, who could not access funds from the formal financial sector" (Kirton 1996:202-203). Indeed, the poor, young adults, women, and unskilled laborers are disproportionately represented.

## Differential Depletion of Natural Resources

Not only do the majority of Caribbean rural residents face more difficult access to assets and markets but the assets at their reach undergo depreciation and depletion at a faster rate. Indeed, the differential depletion of resources is another major node in the generalized process of social exclusion. Most important is the general depletion of agricultural land, its reduced fertility – whether or not declining fertility parallels market depreciation of individual plots. That pan-Caribbean phenomenon is exacerbated in the mountains by faster rates of erosion, especially in territories with either a Cordillera Central (a dorsal-central mountain chain) or a strong peasant presence. Indeed, the two phenomena tend to go together and their combination can be life threatening, as in the case of Haiti, where erosion further increases already abject poverty (Lundahl 1979).

The declining supply of water, both for agriculture and for domestic use, is a close second to the depletion of the land, to which it is tied. Here again, differential depletion marks particularly highland peasants but the shrinking or disappearance of the rain forest also affects lowland rural populations. In enclaves dominated by plantation or mining activities, available water tends to be tapped first for those activities before being made accessible to local residents. At other times, the differential access to assets and the differential depletion of resources combine to reinforce inequality such as when water from the countryside is tapped primarily for urbanites directly for domestic use or, indirectly for electricity.

## Migration as Loss of Human Capital

Differential depletion also threatens human capital, particularly in the form of rural outmigration (Besson and Momsen 1987; Pessar 1982). Caribbean migration is massive. An estimated twelve percent of the total Caribbean population migrated in the 1980s. Such an exodus does reduce both human deprivation and the rate of depletion of natural resources.<sup>8</sup> Further, remittances from these migrants are substantial. They accounted for six percent of GNP throughout the region in the 1980s.

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8. The most striking example is the case of Dominica where century-old patterns of migration from the countryside to the capital town of Roseau and, especially, to foreign lands have contributed to produce an environmental and economic outcome much different from Haiti in spite of the fundamental similarities between the two peasantry (Table X3.1 on migration; Bob Myers on Dominica migration; Trouillot 1988; 1990).

Still, the full story of migration has to do with how particular processes feed into one another. Whether they originate from rural or urban areas, international migrants tend to come not among the poorest but among the most enterprising segments of the local population, sometimes with assets above local averages, almost always in prime productive age (Baker 1997; Hope 1986; Martínez 1995; Pessar 1982). Their remittances usually go to those households that were already better-off, increasing local gaps.<sup>9</sup> Further, with their departure, the community loses in human and social capital. Such losses, in turn, contribute to reduce further rural residents' already limited access to national or local state services, notably health and education. They may also reinforce differentiation within the countryside.

Pessar's (1982) fieldwork on the impact of emigration from a rural community in the Dominican Republic to the United States poignantly reveals the impacts at the local level. The rural migrants whom she studied tended to be from better-off families who could afford to help with the process of migration by providing loans, employment contacts in foreign countries, or assistance in obtaining visas. Migrants, in turn, provided remittances that allowed families to decrease agricultural production.<sup>10</sup> Larger estates hired fewer agricultural workers from among the poor, leading to higher unemployment. Emigrants often bought land at inflated prices and allowed it to lie fallow, further decreasing agricultural production and employment as well as increasing land prices and inducing smaller landholders to sell. The national bias against small peasants (Vedovato 1986) was unwittingly reinforced.

Some authors have pointed to similar processes to suggest the over-all negative of remittances. They argue that while remittances may help specific households, they may also hurt the economy as a whole (Baker 1997; Brana-Shute and Brana-Shute 1982; Pessar 1982; Rubenstein 1982). Others have considered the experiences and impact of returning migrants on local economies, seeing immigration not as a singular event but as a cycle, often with several stages of leaving and return (Martínez 1995; Maurer 1997; Muschkin and Myers 1993; Thomas-Hope 1999). Nevertheless, migration – especially within the region – has a long historical precedent and is seen

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9. For example, in Guyana and St. Lucia, only 10% of emigrants are poor, due to the high costs of emigration. Although one-third of households in Guyana receive remittances, only 13% of these are among the poorest quintile. For these poor households, however, remittances provide an average of one-fourth of the household income. In the Dominican Republic, only 2% of the poorest quintile of households receive remittances, while among the highest quintile this number is 6% (Baker 1997:46).

10. Although over half of the Dominican Republic was rural at the time of Pessar's study, less than a quarter of international migrants came from rural areas.

by many as a common survival strategy for the region (Duany 1994; Richardson 1983; Valtonen 1996).

Be that as it may, given the profile of most Caribbean migrants in their country of origin and their track-record in North America, their departure constitutes a serious loss in human capital. A common Haitian saying is that there are more Haitian doctors in the city of Montreal than in the whole of Haiti. Regardless of its mathematical correctness, the saying expresses the national sense of loss. Given the unequal distribution of human resources between cities and countryside throughout the region, such losses bear more heavily on rural residents. They certainly contribute to reduce further rural residents' already limited access to national or local state services, notably health and education.

### **Differential Access to Services**

Indeed, unequal access to state services may be the most blatant mechanism of economic exclusion of Caribbean rural populations. In general throughout the area, government spending is first oriented toward urban centers. Expenditures directed toward rural populations enter national budgets often as leftovers – except in a few limited domains (such as education, at times) and in a few countries (such as some former British colonies). Health services, in particular, are lacking or limited. Nurses rather than doctors, clinics rather than hospitals, limited hours rather than constant access are the norm. Unequal access to services, which already acts on its own as a major mechanism of economic exclusion of rural populations, thus gives new momentum to the depletion of resources and the intertwined cycles accelerate.

### *The Urban Areas*

As a result of the urban-rural migration, what happens on the urban scene often consolidate the urban/rural divide. Caribbean capitals, have grown tremendously in the second half of this century. In spite of some declines, the annual urban growth rate has generally maintained a steady pace between 1970 and 1995. With the exception of the Bahamas, the highest growth rates in the region for these twenty five years can be attributed to a large extent to rural-urban migration, and especially migration from peasant

areas – as in St. Vincent, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and Dominica (Portes *et al.* 1997) As a result, high ratios of urban residence rarely reflect the strength of an urban-based (or urban-oriented) economy – as in the Bahamas or Trinidad.<sup>11</sup> Most often, they are due to ongoing migration of rural individuals seeking better opportunities.

### *Urban Macrocephalia*

The Caribbean urban scene can be characterized as a case of urban macrocephalia, in which capital cities, looming as gigantic heads of small national bodies, engulf most of the urban population. The development of new activities in secondary provincial towns alleviates at times the demographic burden on the capital. Tourism in Northern coastal towns and bauxite extraction in the interior have helped to reduce Kingston's primacy in Jamaica. Similar trends have affected the Dominican Republic, though to a smaller extent (Portes *et al.* 1993, 1997). Still, most often, in the absence of a spectacular touristic development, most provincial towns lose residents or become stepping stones to longer migratory flows to the capital or to foreign lands.

Poorer residents of the capital towns, most often recent migrants, face processes of social exclusion that echo those of their rural parents or relatives, including differential access to assets, to markets and services. Often, the urban poor display coping strategies similar to those used in the rural areas. But mechanisms of exclusion pick up a different momentum in the city, generated by the necessities of urban life. For instance, the lack of governmental services in some of the poorest neighborhoods – such as lack of tap water, which affects more than 70% of the Port-au-Prince population (Manigat 1991) – cannot be alleviated by the natural environment.

Two crucial changes further impact on the lives of migrants from rural areas. First, they lose the safety net of both the extended family and the family-based network of friends that are the ultimate protection against starvation in the countryside. Second, they find themselves in a context characterized by the overwhelming necessity of cash transactions.

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11. Similarly, high rural residency figures may hide the relative strength of the urban economy as in Barbados.

## Denial of Labor Rights

The urban poor who managed to find employment face differential access to labor rights, especially in light of the general weakness or absence of unions, especially in export-oriented free-trade zones (Frundt 1998). Differential access to the labor market thus takes the lead among processes of exclusion. Unemployment becomes the most immediate problem and the dominant mechanism of socioeconomic exclusion.

Safa (1995:99) reports that female factory workers in the free trade zone of La Romana in the Dominican Republic risk being blacklisted from all factories in the zone for attempts to unionize. Gender thus intertwines with the denial of labor rights in a country where organized labor represents little more than ten percent of the work force and where there are reported cases of forced or coerced factory labor (U.S. Department of State 1997b). Organized labor is even weaker in Haiti. Only in some of the former British colonies, and only in certain sectors of activities, does a strong tradition of organized labor tend to protect workers (Thomas 1984, 1988).

In search of cash, many of the urban poor turn to the informal economy and personal services. More research – both qualitative and quantitative – is needed to evaluate specific processes of social exclusion in the informal economy per se. We know that abuses and the denial of rights can increase. A lamentable case is that of the Haitian "restavèk," rural children who are sent to work as unpaid live-in domestic servants in urban middle-class and elite households in Port-au-Prince.

## THE SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSION

The sociocultural dimension of exclusion strengthens the findings and analyses of the socioeconomic dimension. Here again, the resemblance between countries with a large peasantry is striking. In other countries (e.g., Guyana and Trinidad) the immigration of indentured laborers to work on the plantations created an ethnic divide that still endures (Premdas 1996; Munasinghe forthcoming). Exclusion along ethnic lines also happens in countries that include a substantial number of non-citizen immigrants tied to specific low-paying jobs, such as in the Bahamas or the Dominican Republic (Lemoine 1981; Martínez 1995). Differential access to the dominant language, religious differences, skin color, and other sociocultural attributes and markers also matter. Key to the heuristic coherence of that

dimension is the proposition that sociocultural exclusion processes coalesce in the segmentation of the population in groups that are inherently disadvantaged because their culturally marked origins give them low access to social and cultural capital. Such sociocultural markers may include color, ethnicity, or national origins; language; or gender, as we will see in turn.

## **Sociocultural Prejudice**

The rural/urban divide is relevant also in the sociocultural dimension. To start with, dominant ideology both reflects and reinforces the divide. One extreme example is the case of Haiti, where the Haitian expression "mounn anderò" (indicating "people outside" or "outsiders"), is used to describe peasants or urbanites of peasant origins, verifying the lack of sociocultural cohesion on the national scale. Similar expressions, even when less brutal (such as "campesinos"), carry implicit prejudice.

## **Color, Ethnicity, and National Origins**

The undisputed position of whiteness at the top of the social pyramid throughout of plantation slavery has had deep consequences on the relationship between physical aspect (phenotype) and position in Caribbean social structure. Across various theoretical lines (Lowenthal 1973; Smith 1965; Stolcke 1974), there is little dispute on the existence of a historically honed color gradation in which blackness reduces social status. Today, and in spite of the rise of a nationalist rhetoric in 19th-century Haiti and later, throughout the region, dark skin has lower sociocultural value in all Caribbean countries (Nettleford; Rubenstein 1987:58). Color prejudice functions throughout the area, in different degrees, as a mechanism of exclusion. Neither the presence of a black segment of the elite nor the strength of a "black" political bloc contradicts the fact that light-skin has an exchange value, often captured in matrimonial alliances that enhance the social and economic possibilities of the new breed (e.g. Trouillot 1988, 1995).

Exclusion along ethnic lines (that often coincides with color) also happens in countries that include a substantial number of non-citizen immigrants tied to low-paying jobs. Descendants of Haitians who were born in and are citizens of the Dominican Republic are routinely treated as foreigners and subject to low-pay jobs on sugar plantations, deportations,

and even the destruction of their identity cards by Dominican soldiers (Martínez 1995: 9-10; see also Moya Pons *et al.* 1986) Recent immigrants from Haiti and Dominica also face exclusion on grounds of national and ethnic origins in the Bahamas and the British Virgin Islands, where their children are denied citizenship (Maurer 1997).

In other countries (e.g. Guyana and Trinidad) the much older immigration of indentured laborers from Asia (India, in particular) led to an ethnic divide that first reproduced some of the traits of the urban/rural dichotomy, as citizens of African descent moved to urban settings and gained control over the state, Indians remained mostly in the rural areas. However, over time, due to changing national institutions and further economic possibilities many ethnic Indians gained serious socioeconomic mobility and political positions – notably in Trinidad. Further, as states became less interventionist, the possibility for the black political elite to feed itself from the state apparatus and/or to control political discourse declined (Maingot 1996; Munasinghe forthcoming). Thus, we may be facing a situation in Guyana and especially in Trinidad where both major ethnic groups face social exclusion on the basis of ethnic identity but in different realms of both private and public life.

## **Linguistic Divides and Continua**

Language is often a central cultural marker that leads to the exclusion of "outsiders." In a number of Caribbean countries, a distinct native language (*Creole*) developed and became not only the language of the majority, but in many cases the only language for many. Creole languages have been socially undervalued for centuries. Yet even when they have now achieved official recognition, their value as sociocultural capital remains absolutely inferior to the dominant European language of the territory. Not having decreased sociocultural value not only reinforces prejudice per se, it also affects economic chances, such as job opportunities. Formal education does make a difference, but as we will see later, national educational systems have their own inherent limits.

## **Gender Roles and Exclusion**

The issue of gender highlights how multiple causes can feed into the exclusion of a socially defined group. Gender is a central category of

exclusion in the Caribbean but it is different from the gender differentiation in North Atlantic nations. The gender division of labor in rural areas and the economic independence of market women in many Caribbean countries, notably those with strong peasantry, belie the notion that women in the South are necessarily "behind Western women" in a unilinear continuum of gender equality. However, the comparatively high independence of market and peasant women to carry their own business does not mean the absence of a patriarchal ideology. To the extent that this ideology permeates social relations, exclusion on the basis of gender obtains in a number of Caribbean situations, both rural and urban (Coppin 1995, 1997; Ellis, Conway and Bailey 1996; Mair 1988; Ortiz 1996). Differential access to property along gender lines, which was not the norm in most peasant situations, is now exacerbated by the demise of the peasant economy (e.g. Oriol 1992).

When poor rural women move to urban settings, they confront two kinds of exclusionary forces working against them. During this transition, they tend to lose whatever economic independence and social networks – including gender specific kin solidarity – they may have had in rural areas. Yet Caribbean urban settings are not more liberal on gender issues than rural areas. Indeed, the opposite could be argued on some points, as patriarchal ideology still dominates and migration to cities therefore reinforces gender differentials, creates new patterns of exclusion and domination that often put newly arrived migrant women in worse situations than both their North Atlantic counterpart or the rural sisters they left behind. In general, women workers in urban settings are under-remunerated, and have little legal protection from either unsafe working conditions, low wages, or sexual harassment or abuse in the workplace. That is the case for factory workers as well as paid or semi-indentured domestic workers.

Finally, domestic violence against women is pervasive throughout the region. There is little legal recourse or protection for victims and societal attitudes toward this issue are at to some extent permissive. According to a U.S. official report, in the Dominican Republic, "domestic violence and sexual harassment are widespread. There are no laws protecting citizens from abuse by their spouses, and victims rarely report such abuse" (U.S. Department of State 1997b).<sup>12</sup>

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12. Another specific case where exclusion is based on lifestyle is the case of homosexuals, especially males. Caribbean societies are homophobic societies. The varying degrees of penalization of male homosexuality go from public ridicule or denial of employment to public beatings, to state penalization in Cuba.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION

The institutional dimension emphasizes processes that contribute not only to political exclusion as such, but to exclusion from national affairs as shaped by the presence, absence, or workings of formal institutions. I take institutional life in the broadest sense of participation to include not only such favorite indicators as formal political participation in local and national elections but also the institutional strength of civil society, its capacity to organize, and its ability to establish channels between the state and the citizenry.

In many Caribbean territories, notably a number of British colonies, the solidification of political or civil institutions – such as Parliament, independent presses, labor unions, the civil service or the educational system – happened before independence or even often before the demise of the plantation system. Countries that have been able to build upon that institutional strength now secure greater participation in national affairs than those that never had that base or managed to weaken it (Premdas 1996). A central issue here is the degree to which the consolidation of civil and political institutions in Caribbean societies predates the transformations of the agrarian-based economy. Equally important is the degree to which the reach, strength, and independence of institutions have facilitated or impaired the participation of significant segments of the population in national affairs. At this level we need to recall the fragmented genesis of the Caribbean. Most Caribbean institutions were never meant to serve the whole population of the respective territories. Institutional memory, history and practice have honed them along lines of exclusivity. Still today, national institutions tend to exclude rather than include a majority of the population into their specific sphere of activities.<sup>13</sup> They tend to be incapable of alleviating processes of exclusion. By and large, they have impaired rather than facilitated the participation of significant segments of the population in national affairs, and give them little power in decisions that affect their own future. Viewed in light of their effectiveness at integrating their respective nations, Caribbean institutions are fundamentally weak.

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13. There are two blatant exceptions to this institutional weakness, the military and the Catholic church, especially outside of the English-speaking Caribbean. It is worth noting that these institutions were created from the outside – such as the Haitian or Dominican army, both creations of the U.S. Marine Corps – and with the help of national governments. So to a lesser extent is a third institution, the national school system in most English-speaking countries. That outside-induced institutions helped by the state can claim a national reach says something about the role of the state in nation-building. That other Caribbean institutions cannot, is a sign of their weakness.

## Political Sphere

The relevance of the institutional weakness at the political level can be best seen when we look at democratic practice and its concrete results. Most Caribbean countries have formal democratic systems. However, the extent to which certain groups or individuals actually participating in shaping national affairs varies greatly. Populist and clientelist politics dominate and traditional power networks operate in most of the countries (Gray 1994), increasing the disconnect between formal and actual rights, which characterizes most of continental Latin America (ILO 1995:15).<sup>14</sup> In summary, the superficiality of democratic rule entails both the incapacity of individuals to exercise the rights supposedly guaranteed by law and the incapacity of institutions to structure relations independent of the individual who are temporarily in government positions.

Discussing Jamaican politics, Lundahl (1995:344) notes that both major parties in Jamaica use varied methods, including patronage to gather votes. He adds: "All these methods, however, seem to have one thing in common: they are designed to obfuscate, to increase the costs to opponents and voters of revealing the government's true intent." This is not to suggest that the guarantee of electoral practice, widespread in most of the English-speaking Caribbean is meaningless. Nor is it meaningless to have judges there who most often do not take direct orders from the Executive. The point here – and the lesson from Lundahl's observation – is that the general weakness of national institutions, although varying in degrees, effectively circumscribes the final efficiency of any single set of institutions, including the political ones.

The point is best made by starting with the extreme case of Haiti. The unruly nature of the political sphere there exacerbates process of social exclusion because it restricts and sometimes annihilates forms of interaction – both civil and political – that could challenge mechanisms of exclusion. For instance, the extreme politization of labor unions reminds us of many English-speaking territories within the region. The qualitative difference is that the total dominance of the political sphere in the Haitian case leaves little room for already politically biased unions to intervene with any kind of effectiveness on behalf of workers' rights. They have little room to

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14. O'Neill (1990) shows the gap between formal and actual rights in the extreme case of Haiti under military rule, when widespread military corruption led to long detentions in jail without charges, seeing a lawyer, and physical abuse, often avoided with bribes. His arguments extend to previous states of affairs where rights existed only on paper. Further, similar discrepancies are experienced by other excluded populations – such as migrant laborers, factory female workers elsewhere – in the region.

maneuver outside of state politics and thus they tackle few labor-specific issues outside of an immediately political context. Institutional weaknesses feed into one another. As extreme as that case is, the argument here is that the structural features it suggests are not rare throughout the region though they emerge under various forms.

The limits to the effectiveness of the parliamentary system in Trinidad provide a different example. Ethnic divisions there lead to the difficulty of formalizing anything close to a broad social agreement, which is essential for the functioning of state institution. Programs can be passed or stopped on the basis of ethnic partisanship with little relation to their national effectiveness, as Premdas (1996) suggests was the case of Trinidad's failed National Youth Program.

## **Other Institutions**

While many institutions generally provide a poor level of services and resources, how those resources are distributed also reveals processes of exclusion. In rural areas there is a lack of working institutions. For example, health care in the region is a largely urban institution, and the top elite often use health facilities outside of their nation altogether.<sup>15</sup> The lack of faith in public institutions that provide health care leads to a situation of increasing disparity. Those who have the power to determine budgets and resource allocation to national institutions are not relying themselves on these institutions as they go abroad to get quality services.

The region's health care systems are located disproportionately in cities. A recent report by CONFEMEL stated that in the Latin America and Caribbean region as a whole, there has been a concentration of doctors in urban areas. It attributes that concentration to the fact that resources needed for running a practice are available only in cities. So while the region as a whole (with Haiti as a notable exception) has an increasing number of doctors, rural areas are losing their doctors to cities (Inter Press Service 1999; also see Guerra de Macedo 1992). Thus, policies aimed at rural health must consider the allocation of both material and material resources. Opening clinics in rural areas will not be enough without the guarantee of a permanent staff.

Where governmental institutions are failing to provide needed services for their citizens, other organizations sometimes step in. For example, in Haiti, where "public sector institutions have all but broken down," 1.5

15. Thus after a failed attempt on her life, the sister of the Haitian president was sent to Cuba for relatively minor medical care rather than receiving it at home.

million people – more than one-fifth of the country – receive health care services from local and international NGOs (Baker 1997:41).

Although chronic diseases are an important health problem in the region, contagious diseases disproportionately affect the poor, especially where public-health care systems that they rely on have limited resources and react slowly (Hammer 1996; Weil and Scarpaci 1992:5-6). The 1980s economic crisis may have created larger disparities in health care, as public spending decreased and across the board public subsidies for health care tend to help the rich more, as those who could previously afford private care were forced to turn to public services (Guerra de Macedo 1992:35). Finally and obviously, the lack of medical insurance – especially for poorer segments – leads to larger discrepancies in care (Hammer 1996:6-10). Thus, some observers have suggested that the public sector should focus on problems least addressed through the private sector and that disproportionately affect the poor, such as contagious diseases and clean water.

Education in general provides a good example of an institutional system that claims to be national but does not serve equally the majority and contributes to exclude substantial segments of the population from some forms of participation. First, levels of support are clearly advantageous to groups that are already better-off. For example, universities in the region are for the most part public, and supported by public funds. However, the proportion of the poorest segments of the population who attend universities is disproportionately low. Enrollment in tertiary education among poorest quintile in Jamaica is 1.6%, while in Guyana it is only 1%. Nevertheless, in the Caribbean region per capita expenditures on tertiary education are 15-25 times higher than those on secondary education, and 50 times higher than those on primary education (Baker 1997:137).

The results on primary and secondary education are more mixed. Many countries of the English-speaking Caribbean where primary education developed as a national institution before the downfall of the plantation system stand as world exemplars. Among those, Barbados further stands out.<sup>16</sup> In others, both primary and secondary education serve as institutional node to reinforce social exclusion. Miller (1992) suggests that even reforms aimed originally at reducing exclusion can perversely reproduce it. For example, Haiti's 1978 primary school educational reforms are telling of the processes of exclusion that both feed into and result from the educational

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16. Barbados spending on education as a percentage of government expenditures (19%) and of GNP (7.2%) is high for the region. Over half of the children go to pre-school. Teachers are better trained as a result of a better educational system. For example, primary school teachers all have at least a high school certificate, 73% have a teachers' certificate, and 10% have bachelor's degrees. This is a positively reinforcing cycle (Miller 1992:119-143).

system. These reforms placed the formerly separate administrations for urban and rural education under one Ministry. Creole was introduced as the language of instruction, replacing French, but this was met with some opposition by many parents as they accustomed to language as a form of social capital that education should impart; Creole, as an excluded language, would only serve to further reinforce the exclusion of their children. As private schools did not implement these reforms, many parents switched their children from public to private schools. Thus, in the decade when the largest investment had been made in Haiti's primary education system, less than half the primary school students were in the public system. This strain on the private educational system led to a lowering of teacher standards in order to lower costs, with the result that the teachers in the private system are less qualified than those in the public system. Private schools for children of the upper class are, of course, an exception, as they have the funds to maintain quality teachers. These institutions contribute to maintaining social class distinctions (Miller 1992:145-167). In an unchanged situation of exclusion, even attempt at reform can lead to greater differences.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this section is to suggest ways to address policy issues and to indicate the kind of research needed to guide policy, rather than to prescribe specific "inclusionary" policies. It became clear while writing this document that the majority of data most currently collected – particularly on the quantitative side – does not provide the information necessary to derive specific policy instruments to alleviate social exclusion. Existing statistics underplay the heterogeneity of the Caribbean in terms of the rural-urban divide, the various ethnic groups, across gender, etc. Given that categories of people are not obvious, and must be broken down into different kinds of units in order to see the multiple streams of social exclusion at work, it will seem obvious that problems must be similarly broken down. Units such as "health care" or "women's rights" cannot be considered independently of the forces that create and maintain these forms of exclusion.

The social exclusion approach suggests that reform in one substantive area may be counterbalanced by the potential impacts it may have or the constraints that may exist in another domain and between them. No amount of investment in medical education, for example, can alone provide adequate doctors for rural areas where urban migration is a prevalent force. Nor will civic training of individual officials prevent corruption where the structure

of institutions encourage corrupt practices. What matters is the interaction of these factors.

The key implication for the way we think about social policy in the Caribbean, is that we need to identify the nodes at which processes of exclusion intertwine into the institutional settings that (re)produce social exclusion. While policy instruments should be targeted to specific components, all interventions should consider in their design the potential interactions between the different factors that are generating social exclusion. To give one example, Haiti is full of urgent problems, one of them springs from the relationship between poverty and the environment (Lundahl 1979). No material intervention is more important than stopping environmental degradation. This does *not* mean that other problems are less urgent. It does mean that tackling this problem is more likely to have serious and long-term consequences on others. Yet at the same time, given Haiti's institutional weakness and the marginalization of its peasantry, environmental programs need to be coupled with, or indeed integrate, interventions that will allow the peasantry to enhance its power of decision at the local level. Indeed, only the achievement of the institutional changes required to increase participation at the local level can guarantee the success of environmental programs. The case is unique but the lesson can be generalized. Throughout the region reform has to insist as much on institutional strength, reach, and representation as on content.

Official institutions in the Caribbean are *not* national institutions. So-called formal institutions are institutions whose national reach has been claimed by the state, but whose national effectiveness is dubious. They need to be made national in terms of reach and representation, both geographical and social. This is not just a matter of service delivery. The key issue is participation vs. exclusion. A majority of Caribbean citizens are excluded from the processes that coalesce around these institutions. They are excluded as entrants. They are excluded as outcome. In that sense, Caribbean institutions need to become truly national. That nationalization, in turn, can happen only at the local level.

Finally, in spite of the magisterial failure and weakness of the most visible and formal institutions, there are local institutions which, despite the forces of exclusion working against them, have nevertheless shown remarkable resilience and strength. To call them informal is in part to miss the point of their effectiveness. One thinks of the internal marketing of common consumer goods and foodstuff and the mostly independent market women who sustain that system. One thinks of the various peasant associations so often neglected by both state and NGO workers who walk in the countryside eager to impose their own model of what civil society should be. However,

more research is needed to identify these institutions, to understand how they work, why they work and when and where they falter. Policy must absolutely target them and support them in order: a) to strengthen their reach and nodes – as informally as necessary if research suggests that option; or b) to allow them a smooth transformation to a more formal level if both needed and possible. This also means, of course, that we should have the extreme humility required to talk less about or for the region's excluded and listen more carefully to what they have to say about their exclusion.

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