



SUMMIT IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW GROUP (SIRG)
Ad Hoc Technical Group for the Inter-American Action
Plan on Democratic Governance
Third Meeting
November 14, 2023

OEA/Ser.E
GRIC/CA-IX/GT-DEM/inf.
29 November 2023
Original: English

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL ACTORS

Human Rights and Democracy: Protecting the rights of persons of African descent in the Americas

A report on the current challenges, opportunities, and best practices on *Mandate 9.b*. “Persons of African descent, taking into account their inherent human rights, history, cultures, and traditions, and taking into account, where applicable, and according to domestic law, public policy arrangements for their empowerment, inclusion, participation, and representation.”

INTRODUCTION:

Persons of African descent in the Americas have traversed many forms of discrimination since all these persons were not slaves yet were subjected to domestic law, policy arrangements for empowerment, inclusion, participation and representation in Canada, the United States and the Caribbean (influenced by British and French customs and law). Slavery being the watershed in its abolition across the region shows the level of challenges, opportunities and best practices for the Americas. From 1793 in Canada, 1834 in the Caribbean and 1865 in the United States, we can see the differences in accepting Africans as members of society. The call from the Governor of Jamaica claims the planters wanted what the House of Commons could do in England they could in Jamaica starting the movement towards self-government. According to Williams 1970,¹ the issue between the metropolitan and the colonies was not an academic one.

What was at stake, Williams continued, was the Navigation Acts. The difference between dependence and independence was the difference between restricted trade and free trade. The French West Indian colonies resorted to revolts which were quickly quelled. The Code Noir became the license of ownership of the persons of African descent in the French, Dutch, and British colonies. Here we see the challenge of the dignity of the human as slaves being chattel denying him/her the elementary rights as a human. The difference here is the Spanish Cedula of 1783 in Trinidad, abrogated by the British in 1797. The free coloureds were given the civil equality with the whites.²

There was an established European Sector and African Sector in the Caribbean Economy as the twentieth century opened. According to Williams 1970, even profit from his own slave garden was denied to him; down to his dress there were laws indicating his inferiority. Then came according to Williams 1970, the products of manumission and miscegenation between the white master or overseer and black slave. The 1900s saw a claim to self-governance where most of the countries claimed Independence from the British Empire whilst remaining members of a

¹ Williams, E. *From Columbus to Castro The History of the Caribbean*. Carlton Publishing Group. 1970

² Campbell, C. *Trinidad's Free Coloureds in Comparative Caribbean Perspectives*. Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World. Sheperd, V and Beckles, H. Editors. 2000

Commonwealth. This accommodation created challenges of identity as persons of one sector of society saw themselves as serving the Crown including holding on to the Privy Council as the final court of Justice.

CHALLENGES

In the slave narratives from the United States we can highlight illiteracy and through the words of James W. C. Pennington, the being of slavery, its soul and body, lives and moves in the chattel principle, the property principle, the bill of sale principle, the cart-whip, starvation, and nakedness are its inevitable consequences, to a greater or lesser extent, warring with the dispositions...^{3/} Further, to Barbados we hear of social apartheid where Liqa M. Zacharias claimed 'racism was spawned by the plantation slavery'. The institutionalised notion of white superiority and black inferiority was reflected in corporate and financial institutions in the region.

According to Brereton, B. 1985, the two forces that shaped Caribbean society in the hundred years after Emancipation are the pattern of race relations and the racism of the dominant whites and of the British officials who ran the region's economies and governments. The other being a system of classes and class stratification. The three-tier system of white upper class, the coloured and Black middle class and the Black masses, the former slaves. By the 1930s there was an increase in coloured, Black professionals and Black and Indian businessman and farmers who acquired money and property.

In Latin America and Latino Caribbean, we see the presence of racial bias in the criteria for lending and onboarding for bank accounts. There needs to have AI facial recognition that is culturally sensitive on blacks, the documentation and verification requests need to be centered among community, tribal, and family relationship in a more ethnic manner. Credit rating can be upgraded to make access viable for blacks.

EMPOWERMENT, INCLUSION, PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

The question of inclusion still eludes us up to today in 2023. Inclusion yes but to what extent? Empowerment is still elusive as the African descendants are given all that society can give but the notion of hidden agendas and club memberships still prevent the full inclusion, participation, and representation of the African descendants. Tokenism and affirmative action instituted the minority system which proved the absence of authentic race relations as this was abused in many forms by both sides.

BEST PRACTICE

The best practice of inclusion can be seen in the steelband movement in Trinidad and Tobago. In a steelband (made up of different pans) there is no age limit, no race distinctions, no gender disparities, no religious backgrounds, and no need to have prior understanding of music. Its welcoming embraces all interested persons who want to beat pan and enjoy the melodies produced by the instruments.

The era of Christian indoctrination as opposed to the African religions was bridged by this instrument as we see the meshing of people transcending their own specific identities to create another of cosmic value. One that will take the world over to the new era of networks and connections and a Universal Church embracing all people. The Ordinance of July 1883 which

³ *Let's Save the Children*. Orthodox Christian Center, Barbados. 1999.

amended that of 1868 restricted owners of dwellings to accommodate persons dancing to drums.^{4/} Seeking alternative instruments in garbage pans, drums, discarded sheets of metal, and tins, the free people began experimenting with sounds. Again, education playing a great part in the development; the music became clearer as beats were according to the rhyme. One such beat was the Callenda. In 1935 while playing in the Tamboo Bamboo Band a bamboo broke on the street. So as not to lose the rhythm Oscar Pile took a garbage bin from the side of the street and kept up the rhythm. Biscuit covers and other pans, any form of metal was used to knock to make music. Ellie Manette, one of the pioneers explained that notes on the pan had to be added. He saw Spree Simon, another pioneer, had a concave pan top with three notes. He wanted a better pan. So, he experimented but couldn't get the sound Spree Simon got, then he decided to use the convex top. This was the beginning of a long creative history of the Steelpan. However, the steelpan was banned by a Papal Bull of 1967 forbidding the playing of the steelpan in Church. Without any formal knowledge of music, anyone can play the steelpan. From dustbin covers to chromed steelpans tuned to the point where classical music can be drawn from the knocking of pan sticks by players who learnt the notes by listening without any idea of formal music education. From walking the streets with a pan around the neck to the famous international halls of music and music festivals. From being called a hooligan to being called a pioneer was the journey of the tuner or pannist. From 'behind the bridge' to corridors of universities both local and foreign the steelpan rings its notes. From using ad hoc tools of laborers to mechanical instruments to detect sounds and level the instruments.

CONCLUSION

The promotion of bilateral dialogues with actors or organizations of the Afro-descendant movement has allowed for greater and better dialogue. Developing a work plan based on the experience of previous years made it possible to better focus the actions to be promoted and identify key actors in the Hemisphere who are most consistent in the Afro-descendant movement. Coordinating actions with other population groups is a good practice that generates synergies and allows us to learn more about the work of each population space.

Approaches with academia and other key actors who have supported the construction of a minimum agenda have allowed us to establish minimum agreements with strategic allies that add to the incidental action of the Afro-descendant movement.

Maintaining precise communication with organizations from other countries facilitates dialogue and the establishment of common points to articulate. The involvement of community leadership in the processes gives legitimacy to the processes.

The intersectional perspective has made it possible to find the common points that exist between different groups when it comes to discrimination for religious reasons, as well as to find the differentiated violation that exists.

Adopt a curriculum to include Folklore Education. Address the concepts and language of racism which should be linked/framed as handed down through a broader structure existing today that influences daily lives. A Monitoring structure needs to be developed and availability to all needs to be evaluated and published across the sectors and society.

According to the World Bank Report on Afro-descendants in Latin America, Afrocentric approaches to crime and violence prevention therefore require a review of education and socialization programs that are already in place, as well as a change of mindset regarding

⁴ Mohammed-Oxley, G. *The steelband movement as an image of Church*. Paper presentation at the III Social Doctrine of the Church Congress Latin America and the Caribbean.2023

institutional biases that lead to stigmatization and criminalization of young Afro-descendants, exacerbating crime poverty traps in Afro-descendant communities.^{5/} The World Bank further states, Education is one of the best tools to break the cycle of chronic poverty that affects a large part of these households. However, even when they have access to education, they often do not benefit from the same quality, knowledge, skills, and economic gains that should be generated afterwards.^{6/}

The idea of a free people from one State, being termed ‘minority’, in another State of the same geographical region leaves a lot to be desired. The mixed race has its being in all races and needs its space to grow and develop. The concept of being black or minority is making a socio-cultural identity challenge to the person and allows rejection from equal opportunity as a consequence. The IX Summit is called to address these anomalies and have the “*empowerment, inclusion, participation, and representation*” of Afro-descendants become a vision of the OAS.

⁵ Afro-descendants in Latin America, Towards a Framework of Inclusion. Worldbank Group. 2018

⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/lac/publication/afrodescendants-in-LAC>