

Structuralism and human development: a seamless marriage? An assessment of poverty, production and environmental challenges in CARICOM countries

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Abstract

The paper examines current human development experience of CARICOM nations focusing on the interconnected challenges of poverty, production and the environment that shows continuing uneven development. Using an extended structuralist framework based on international political economy dynamics, it incorporates organisational dynamics and domestic politics, especially the role of rents in influencing productive and inclusive development. In this way, the paper examines the 2016 Caribbean Human Development Report (CHDR) and finds evidence that human development proxied by expenditures on education and healthcare has been decoupled from productive capability evinced by decreasing industrial output. We concur with recent critiques of the human development paradigm (HDP) that it has ignored a productionist view of development and thus limits the scope of development policy to bring about broad production transformation. By and large, structural heterogeneity also represents a challenge in CARICOM countries'. Linked to questions of development finance, we find that the CHDR's analysis of environmental concerns offers a narrow instrumentalist view and further marginalizes a deeper understanding of CARICOM countries' asymmetrical relationship with transnational forces in the global economy. This contribution offers an integrated approach showing continued peripherality and helps identify structural, socio-political and technical drivers that underpin the region's complex development challenges.

Keywords: CARICOM; human development paradigm; Caribbean plantation economy; structuralism; poverty; environmental sustainability

JEL Codes: B5, O14, O25, O54, Q56

Introduction

For observers of countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the region is replete with paradoxes¹. The region has several small island states with an average per capita income of over US\$448.00 that make them middle and upper-middle income countries, according to the World Bank (World Bank 2019). This has meant that concessionary lending and overseas development assistance are curtailed (Dagher 2019). Even with small populations, public debt in the region is among the highest in the world, with Barbados at 126 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Grenada at 62.7 per cent, Jamaica standing at 97.4 per cent, while Guyana remains among the heavily indebted poor countries (Caribbean Development Bank 2018; ECLAC 2018a). These countries also continue to be integrated into circuits of global capital that seek out high-yielding opportunities supported by major international institutions and face disproportionate effects of the climate crisis. They remain among the most indebted in the world that reflect their marginalized role in the global economy (Sealey-Huggins 2017). They comprise several tourism-based, offshore financial centres and resource rich nations making them acutely vulnerable to exogenous economic and environmental shocks (ECLAC 2011, 2018a; Heger et al. 2008). With respect to vulnerability to climate change, Dominica and Haiti rank among the top three countries at-risk globally, having been successively devastated by hurricanes Irma and Maria, dramatically increasing the loss of human life and infrastructure damages (Eckstein et al. 2018). It is estimated that these storms had a cumulative cost of US\$5.4 billion to Caribbean Community island nations and territories (hereafter CARICOM) during the 2017 season alone² (ECLAC 2018b).

¹ The English-speaking Caribbean refers primarily to 14 members of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) including Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Haiti later gained membership in 2002.

² The effects were assessed in terms of physical damage, losses of incomes and social services, plus additional costs. In Dominica, damages totaled \$930.9 million, while losses amounted to approximately \$380.2 million – the equivalent of 226 percent of the 2016 GDP, while damages and losses in Antigua and Barbuda amounted to \$155 million.

Table 1. Macro-economic, social and environmental indicators of CARICOM countries³

Country	Population (total)	Real per capita income (US\$) 2017	Main sector / per cent of GDP	Public Debt to GDP (as a per cent)	Human development status	Climate risk exposure (ND-GAIN ranking)
Antigua and Barbuda	104,084	14803.01	Tourism / 60	88.2	07.80 (70)	126
The Bahamas	403,095	30,762.01	Tourism / 50 Financial services / 15	57.4	0.807 (54)	46
Barbados	287,010	16,356.98	Tourism / 39 Financial services / 20	126.9	0.800 (58)	53
Belize	390,231	4971.20	Tourism / 38.1	92.9	0.708 (106)	118
Dominica	74,679	6719.34	Tourism / 24.8 Agriculture / 14.3	73.3	0.715 (103)	75
Grenada	108,825	10,451.03	Tourism / 24.2	62.7	0.772 (75)	68
Guyana	786,508	4655.14	Agriculture / 19.4 Mining (bauxite, diamonds, gold) / 18.1	44.5	0.654 (125)	123
Jamaica	2,906, 339	5114	Tourism / 20 Remittances / 14	97.7	0.732 (97)	97
St. Kitts/Nevis	56,345	17924.07	Tourism / 26.8	58.2	0.778 (72)	90
St. Lucia	180,454	9715.20	Tourism / 65	67.8	0.747 (90)	68
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	110,488	7145.10	Tourism / 23.4	73.4	0.723 (99)	50
Suriname	573,085	5317.39	Mining / 26.2	62.5	0.720 (100)	76
Trinidad and Tobago	1,375,443	16,126.40	Natural gas and hydrocarbon products / 45	62.2	0.784 (69)	77

Source: World Bank Development Indicators, UN Human Development Reports, CIA FactBook, Caribbean Development Bank 2018

³The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Country Index summarizes a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in tandem with its readiness to improve resilience. Lower ranked countries suggest a high level of vulnerability and low level of readiness and resilience. See here: <https://gain-new.crc.nd.edu/ranking>. Barbados, Dominica and St. Lucia also feature in the Global Climate Risk Index (Eckstein, Hutfils, & Wings 2018).

Although CARICOM nations have historically had a relatively similar production structure geared towards agricultural exports, based in part on topography that determines the availability of natural resources and their shared colonial history (Farrell 1982; Kemp-Benedict et al. 2018), their economies have become more complex. These countries' level of exposure to economic pressures both directly related to their longstanding integration into the world economy and shaped by their interaction with external markets provide the main source of demand for their products. There is however a certain degree of structural diversity in terms of the level of development and degree of economic specialisation among these countries (see Table 1 above), with Jamaica showing growth in the last few years in primary production, while Barbados, Belize, and Guyana showing a relative decline in primary export basket (Schincariol et al. 2017). On the issue of poverty, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), while the income-poor made up more than 28% of the regional population in 2014, larger numbers accounting for 50.9% remain vulnerable to poverty (ECLAC 2018b). Given these factors, the policy shift towards human development as expansion of capabilities, including political, civic rights, healthcare and education needs have been widely embraced in the region (PIOJ 2014; Stewart 2019; UNDP 2004). These concerns have however been at the expense of broad conceptualisation of development linked to structural changes in production towards a deeper level of technological sophistication in export products and employment generation (Andreoni and Chang 2017; Farrell 1982). CARICOM rankings in terms of climate vulnerability show that income status or per capita income, or 'development' by World Bank terms on the one hand, and capacity to withstand shocks diverge significantly.

These considerations and the paradoxes that underlie the empirical reality of the CARICOM development experience motivate this paper. In 2012, and subsequently in 2016, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Latin America and the Caribbean Office

undertook important development-focused studies that sought to integrate concerns about human security, poverty, environmental stress and household economic vulnerability in several CARICOM states⁴ (UNDP 2012; UNDP 2016a). Both reports attempt to cast human development within context based on two different thematic concerns, the first human security, and the second multidimensional poverty and progress. In particular, the 2016 Caribbean Human Development Report (hereafter CHDR), uniquely themed ‘‘multidimensional progress beyond income’, centres on ‘the multidimensional challenges of sustainable development and human progress taking into consideration the particularities of the Caribbean’, and with a specific on the household and community levels (UNDP 2016a: vi). It investigates ‘the specific circumstances and deep structural challenges that continue to hinder the Caribbean regarding its wide, progressive agenda for human development and economic transformation’ (UNDP 2016a: 2). This current essay argues that the narrow framework that underpins the CHDR does not offer adequate explanation of why the CARICOM region is in its current development conundrum. It proposes that, by revisiting the structural development economic literature, or structuralism, we can gain better insight into these issues and underlying reasons towards more appropriate policy constructs including the long maligned area of industrial policy.

The paper thus critically reviews the CHDR’s conceptualisations and policy recommendations linked to poverty, production and environmental sustainability. Using content analysis, this contribution addresses how human development has been framed, and to what extent the report’s analysis, findings and policy conclusions adequately account for the empirical realities aforementioned. We review seminal historical literature based on the structuralist tradition to illustrate its relevance to contemporary development concerns. Data that accompany the empirical

⁴ This study focuses on the 2016 report as it addresses environmental, poverty and economic concerns simultaneously. For interesting reviews of the 2012 report, see (Gomez, Gasper, and Mine, 2016) and (Munroe and Blake 2017).

analysis are drawn from a variety of sources, including the World Development Bank, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters Emergency Events Database (CRED EM-DAT), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC or *CEPAL*), and the Caribbean Development Bank to support the overall argument. The paper thus sketches an integrated approach to consider the structural, technical and socio-political drivers of major development challenges in the CARICOM region. The paper is structured as follows: given the aforementioned purpose of the report, the next section surveys the plantation economy school as part of the structuralist tradition and offers an analytical framework that delineates the approach's usefulness linked to understanding contemporary Caribbean development. Section 3 frames the definitions and issues contained in the report, after which the subsequent sections comprehensively reviews the CHDR focusing on three main themes of poverty, production and the environment. In so doing, the following sections then examine the report's conceptual tools, methodology, findings and policy recommendations, juxtaposed against some recent empirical data. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main points and briefly discusses some implications for theory and policy.

Literature Review

Revisiting the Plantation Economy School and New Directions in development economics

In the heyday of development economics, human development (though not so termed at the time) was intricately linked to the modernising production structure of societies through industrialisation, and the relationship of this process to both internal and external forces (Singer 1950; Prebisch 1950; for recent contributions that integrate earlier insights, see Evans and Heller 2015; Stewart 2019). Development economics grew out of the concern for the specific uneven or winner-lose relationship between nations in the centre capitalist countries and the peripheral

regions, including the Caribbean and Latin America during the post-war period (Fischer 2015). With significant scepticism towards prevailing neoclassical economic theories that promoted participation in the world markets, structural theorists explained why some countries became wealthy and successfully industrialized, while others appeared, locked into producing lower value primary products and did not industrialize (Prebisch 1950). To remedy the unequal dynamic, policy leaders at the Economic Commission for Latin America led by Raul Prebisch suggested that industrialization geared towards producing for domestic markets could remove the impediments of growth (Ocampo 2001; Saad-Filho 2005). Dependence on technologies from external markets, in particular transnational corporations, also proved detrimental to growth prospects of these former colonies and could create foreign exchange shortages and ongoing balance of payments problems (Cimoli and Porcile 2016; Vernengo 2006). Moreover, the lack of entrepreneurial capabilities in these peripheries was also deemed an important source of development problems for poorer countries that resulted in unbalanced growth (Hirschman 1958). In this scenario, declining terms of trade where low-value primary exports yielded insufficient foreign exchange to purchase imports were of increasing concern since peripheral economies were driven by demand for energy and raw materials in the industrialized world.

As a critique to Arthur Lewis' model of development (Lewis, 1950), Caribbean dependency scholars, also known as the New World Group or Plantation Economy School (PES), were themselves inspired by the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis and the intellectual currents at the time associated with Gunnar Myrdal, Dudley Seers and Paul Baran. The PES however drew important distinctions from the Latin American tradition. They noticed certain patterns in small CARICOM economies that tended towards stagnation, but in these newly decolonized countries, their integration had resulted in a monoculture economy that was unable to advance structural changes to achieve higher standards of living (Best and Levitt 1969; Girvan and Girvan 1973).

These theorists sought to carve out an intellectual space to resolve problems associated with the early experiences of relatively open markets and later laissez-faire industrialisation – a model that drew heavily upon Nobel laureate in economics Arthur Lewis (Marshall 2008; McKenzie 2005). The New World Group, as they were called, put forward perspectives that emphasized that the racialized metropolitan-colony relationship was a principal cause of economic stagnation – and why economic growth did not translate into development or dynamic economic growth. For them, the economic behaviour resulted from the encounters with Northern and European colonial-inspired institutions that put in place racialized labour. This recognition constituted a major plank of their theoretical explanation of the character of CARICOM economies (Best, 1968). Girvan (1973) also posited that mineral exploitation depended on multinational resource-producing enterprises that created an economic imbalance, insofar as they were disconnected from the rest of the economy, did not generate ‘return value’, repatriated the majority of its profits which created major difficulties for CARICOM economies and governments.

In this respect, the PES emphasized the legacy of plantation in the economy, in particular the institutional structures and constraints (Getachew 2020), which the contemporary CARICOM economies had inherited from colonialism (Best 2012; Best and Levitt 1969). This dependent relationship and unequal, passive integration in the global economy likewise had implications for sovereignty, and the pursuit of autonomous economic policies to chart their collective development on their own terms (Bishop 2015; Lewis 2013). This was evident by the several incursions on ‘sovereignty’ in the region, such as the Grenadian invasion by the United States, the US occupation of Haiti as well as the massive effects occasioned by the withdrawal of concessions in trade deals with Europe. This was not merely a function of the small size of these islands that render them vulnerable, but of the institutional structure and historical economic and

political relationships that stringently circumscribed the policy space for these countries to determine their own future (Dagher 2019).

As a result, in similar fashion to Latin American structuralists (Saad-Filho 2005), plantation economists emphasized the nature of economic organisation, institutional characteristics of these societies, and external relations with capitalist economies that reproduced persistent poverty and inhibited structural transformation (Beckford 1999; Best and Levitt 2009). However, the distinct nature of the relationship was conceived as a ‘total institution’ in which growth was induced by the offshore economy that prevent the emergence of coherent internal economies and dynamic growth (Getachew 2020). Production and distribution decisions of the economy by foreign owners were thus largely determined by external forces, and domestic actors’ behaviour and interpersonal relations reflected this power relationship. This type of society had an overall hierarchical or top-down structure based on racial discrimination and ethnicity, supposed lower skills and class, and reproduced inequality (Beckford 1999). This was equally manifested in the consumer bias and behaviour of elites whose consumer tastes favoured foreign imports over local substitutes or goods. Institutions therefore had to be totally transformed to correct these social, economic and political misgivings and to create a dynamic comparative advantage away from simply exporting natural resources, such as agriculture.

Moreover, the theoretical approach sought to mirror the major empirical concerns that mounted the critique of the PES is that the so-called ‘industrialization by invitation’ – coined by Lloyd Best – that did not generate the employment anticipated across CARICOM economies involved in light manufacturing or capital intensive industrialization (Carrington 1966). This remained a major bugbear. Nor did the industrial plans that were initially set out, for example in Jamaica in the 1950s, nor in Trinidad and Tobago from the mid-1950s help reposition these economies on a sustained growth path (Bernal 1988). The nature of the state and its interactions

under postcolonial conditions were however not clearly articulated, as part of the PES model that left a great deal of room for misinterpretation and limited policy direction (Girvan 2006). PES theorists over-emphasized the role of transnational forces in defining economic production decisions that left little room for agency (e.g. Girvan 2006). In major respect, they characterized these social relations in a very static and monolithic manner, and did not fully explore the changes in society and the major influences of those adjustments after colonialism. The PES did not acknowledge the potential of certain public interventions or the role of organized labour to influence and remedy credit constraint that could support its redistributive power to support and finance education, health and social programs or via nationalizations or equity acquisitions, thus leaving the relationship between social forces, elites and political infrastructures under-theorized (Dagher 2019; Edwards 2017a; Perry 2018).

More contemporary structuralist explanations inspired by these earlier approaches can offer deeper insight into structural changes and human development occurring today (Chang and Andreoni 2019; Khan 2018). Scholars of the earlier structural development economics acknowledged the importance of a dynamic shift in the economic system as a whole to encourage new industry and productive capabilities (Robert and Yoguel 2016). Taking inspiration from this approach, Andreoni and Chang (2016, 1) conceived development as ‘a process of production transformation led by the expansion of collective capabilities and resulting in the creation of good quality jobs and sustainable structural change’. Accordingly, Chenery (1975) explained that the structuralist approach seeks to ‘identify specific rigidities, lags, and other characteristics of the structure of developing economies that affect economic adjustments and the choice of development policy’. These structural problems thus cannot be addressed through a focus on comparative advantages, narrow set of capabilities, or efficient (re)allocations of factor endowments based on remedying market imperfections (e.g. Lin 2012). Rather, industrial policies that create and

coordinate new investments can help create interdependencies and complementariness between capital, demand and skills and technologies (Hirschman 1958; Perry 2018). Human development thus results from an endogenous process of transforming the production structure from a dominant agriculture or resource-based one through shifting class relationships that may come from institutional realignments within the society to build upon existing capabilities across structural, political and organizational domains (Khan 2018). These realignments may generate certain multiplier effects and are causally interlinked to social provisioning as rents gained from exports or production can improve wage conditions and investment in the economy.

In this sense, rents refer to incomes generated from productive activity and transfers from public institutions to social groups through deliberate public action (Khan 2018; Ngo and McCann 2018). The distribution of these rents and benefits are interspersed with global market dynamics, as international trade rules and prices of goods such as agricultural or hard commodities affect how they are generated and their quantity in any given year. The competition for rents among social groups and powerful actors in large measure help determine how institutions perform in developing countries with a single dominant economic sector, like natural resources or service-oriented activity, as the case in several CARICOM countries. Within this understanding, rent management systems are methods of organising politics, institutions, and the industry structure to create, transfer and distribute these surplus incomes (Ngo 2016). The organisation of power among external and domestic actors define the extent to which beneficiary firms or public agencies can intervene to improve productivity, invest in new institutions which help determine the impact, positive or negative, on dynamic growth (Ngo 2016; Perry 2018). These arrangements may be based on informal deals between firms in the domestic onshore sector of the economy, and the political elites to maintain levels of production and profits. Unlike Lewis' formulation, these arrangements may encourage a traditional or informal sector to emerge as certain segments of the community utilise

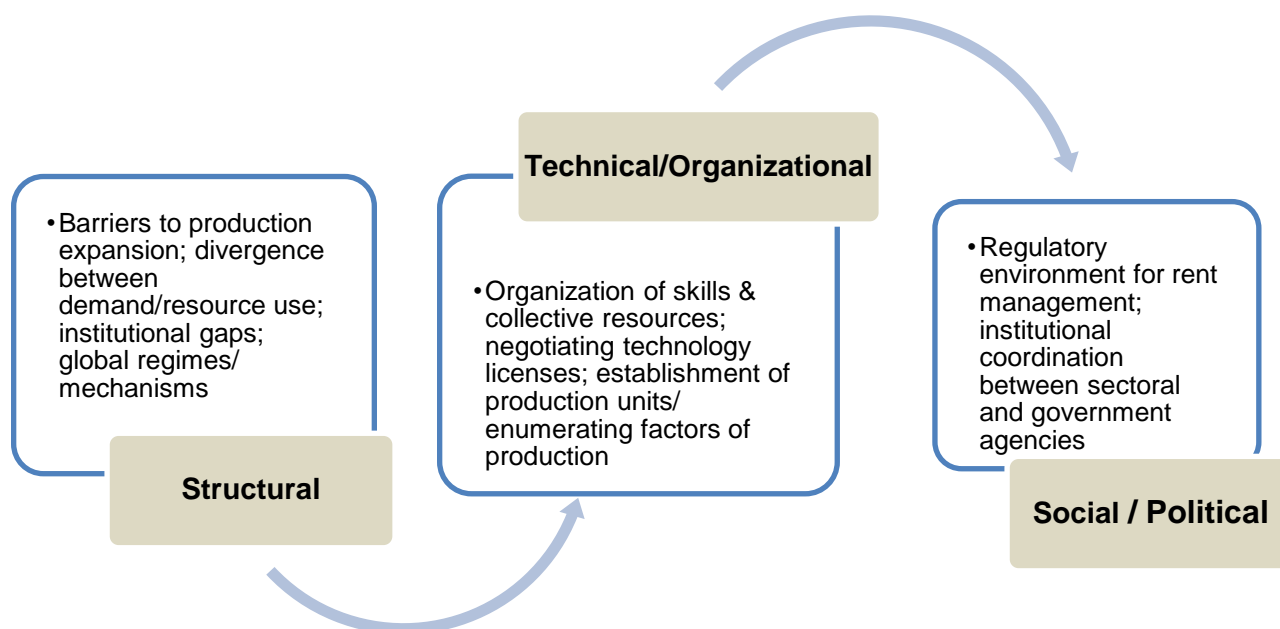
local resources in trading with the local population or certain tourists as their main markets. This may generate certain foreign exchange.

Moreover, rents from natural resources or exports in this way may serve as investible resources for creating the conditions for industrial policy and redistribution (Perry 2018).

Governments that lack the fiscal base or political capability to mobilise domestic resources for productive investment, given the external environment or international strictures, and thus compete for foreign investments to address diseconomies of scale, a narrow set of capabilities and trade dependence (Farrell 1982; Hausmann and Klinger 2009).

These arrangements involve the interdependent and asymmetrical interactions among three main domains, namely structural, organisational or technical, and the socio-political process. In a structurally-dependent economy, the political and organisational context and the wider influences of transnational forces and actors is analytically significant. As part of this social transformation process, markets are but one area of economic organisation. Structural factors, notably international finance in a developing economy whose economic structure suited colonial accumulation influence the possibilities for productive transformation to meet the basic needs of the population. The availability of finance in the domestic and international markets, and the rules than underpin their mobilization, and the relationship between finance in the production process can foster or constrain industrial activities. On the technical/organisational domain, state policy and policy leaders seek to organize economic activities, including the distribution of policy rents through administrative and public agencies to deploy capital, foster new skills and expand production capabilities (Ngo 2016). Through the state, elites and sometimes marginalized factions seek to transfer resources from certain social groups to another, or from one sector to another to transform erstwhile institutional and productive relationships.

Figure 1. Structural, technical and socio-political (STP) drivers that constitute the transformative rationale for development policy



Source: adapted from (Perry 2020)

In postcolonial societies, where new production may be stymied by powerful incumbent groups' (usually merchant capitalists) who try to maintain the status quo based on colonial racial and class structures. Marginalized actors or factions, like community groups, labor unions or civic leaders may organize to mount a challenge to reorder the distribution of benefits/rights including education, jobs, healthcare entitlements, better wages, new assets for new intermediate groups (Edwards 2017; Teichman 2019). The pattern of development is contingent and varies over time based on the available resources, changing class relationships and/or the external environment. These propositions lead us to consider an expanded view of human development based on broader production considerations.

While human development has been implicitly entangled in development theory from the beginning, recent development policy associated with the human capabilities approach have paid less attention to production concerns (Amsden, 2010; Chang 2013; Andreoni and Chang 2017;

Stewart 2019). The expanded structuralist perspective considers the role of broad-based industrial and social policy that create interdependencies beyond manufacturing towards service activities, boost technological upgrading and expands skills and employment opportunities while attending to external constraints and pressures. These new productive arrangements, and the productive flexibility in determining what new commodities are emerging in the global economy require shifts in political, organisational and economic arrangements. This approach offers policy makers and movements to take a realist account of their circumstances to broaden the skills and technological capability based in new economic arenas and political organisation and operate both within existing arrangements and create new possibilities for social reproduction and help develop more environmentally inclusive industries and sectors that help generate improved wages and entitlements for workers across the economy. This framework to expand production and improve human development outcomes offers a new prism to understand contemporary and prevailing circumstances and will now applied to examine the CHDR (2016).

Framing the Caribbean Human Development Report – definitions and issues

This section defines the main concepts and issues addressed in the CHDR by drawing upon ‘*Chapter one: A new paradigm for assessing vulnerability: embracing human development*’, locating it in the broader poverty and development literature. The 2016 CHDR was inspired by an interest to consider the specific development realities of the CARICOM region – this was the major concern of the PES – based on a concern that challenges vulnerabilities were multiplying and proliferating causing poverty (Gomez et al. 2016; UNDP 2016a). These reports serve as an agenda-setting, norm diffusing and policy advocacy tool developed through deliberative dialogue among stakeholders (Gomez et al. 2016). In addition, they help to focus policy attention on so-called

structural and strategic matters with a better chance of achieving impact⁵. In May 2015, the UNDP Latin American and Caribbean Office brought together its professional staff to engage in dialogue with twelve stakeholders from the academic, public, non-governmental, private sectors, and civil society of six CARICOM countries⁶.

In the CHDR framework, multidimensional poverty describes a series of multiple deprivations in addition to household income that take into account health, education, and living standards, and shows both the incidence and intensity of poverty (Alkire et al. 2015). It represents an agglomeration of multiple measures to indicate whether poverty at the individual and household level is being reduced or increasing over time. This notion of development is consistent with an approach beyond simply income that is at the centre of this report (Stewart 2019). The report utilizes classification of near-poor and vulnerable to represent groups and individuals that suffer from these multiple deprivations based on level of income, social status, gender, and age that have over the years been exacerbated by low economy-wide growth that prevents their upward social mobility. In this respect, the Report defines multidimensional progress, based on normative considerations as

‘nothing that diminishes the rights of people and communities or jeopardizes the environmental sustainability of the planet can be regarded as progress. To achieve this progress, the definition of well-being must be expanded to include decent work, quality education, gender equality, social protection and care systems that are within reach of

⁵ The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) identifies multiple deprivations at the household and individual level in health, education and standard of living. It uses micro data from the household surveys. Each person in a given household is classified as poor or non-poor depending on the weighted number of deprivations his or her household, and thus, he or she experiences. See: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/what-multidimensional-poverty-index>.

⁶ The author sat as a member of this committee.

households, and contribute to the development of safe communities, and care for the environment’ (UNDP 2016a, 32).

Integral to this level of progress is a consideration of economic, environmental and social vulnerability that underscores a range of ‘structural constraints’ that impede one’s ability to adapt and better quality of life overall (UNDP 2014, 2016b).

Poverty

The notion of multidimensional progress in the CARICOM region is squarely concerned with vulnerability and poverty, making the case for that higher levels and the creation of new classes of ‘near-poor’ and ‘poor’ which have particularly arisen over recent years. This is in part due to government’s inability to consolidate human development gains and low levels of growth (UNDP 2016a). Chapter two ‘*Profiling human vulnerability in the Caribbean: who are most vulnerable and why?*’ and Chapter 3 ‘*Persistent poverty and inequality influence human vulnerabilities and affect multidimensional progress*’ are the main focus of this section’. The CHDR highlights vulnerability by use of its counterfactual, resilience or adaptive capacity, that is people’s exposure to multiple interlocking economic, social or environmental hazards are based on their ability to avert or absorb a given shock (UNDP 2014, 2016a). Though the three areas overlap in complex ways to generate particular outcomes, this section focuses on the first two while the following sections will analyse and discuss the environmental dimension discretely.

In the report, economic vulnerability is characterized by people who possess means above the poverty line but are incapable of reaching the middle class measured in terms income between US\$10 – US\$50 per day (UNDP 2016a). This notion thus elaborates the factors that relate to the risk of falling back into poverty, as unequal pay for the same work, having disproportionate amount of home-based responsibilities for women, or facing the risk of un/under-employment, insecure

sources of income, higher health care costs, poverty, discrimination and social exclusion, limited access to land or land rights, or lower levels of social protection (UNDP 2016a). Social exposure on the other hand, results from violation of human, civil and political liberties, and people being discriminated from accessing services or purchase goods based on personal or group characteristics. Moreover, the CHDR further identifies the causes of these vulnerabilities as linked to high levels of indebtedness (see table 1), high costs for food imports and high costs for energy. It further notes that a reduction in poverty in the six case countries, while poverty is becoming worse in another five, with high levels of indigence⁷ in Haiti, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis and Belize. The report further acknowledges that ‘the specific circumstances and deep structural challenges that continue to hinder the CARICOM region regarding its wide, progressive agenda for human development and economic transformation’ are undoubtedly related to ‘people escaping poverty’ through ‘educational attainment and the labor market’, as well as social protection and access to financial and physical non-monetary assets (UNDP 2016a: 32). Such considerations are not focussed per se on institutional or society-level capacity to deliver important public and social goods (Hickey et al. 2015), but rather an emphasis on human vulnerability and resilience at the household and community level. It also highlights that such a trend has been observed in CARICOM countries, with extreme cases in Jamaica and the Dominica, over the last decade, with lower attainments in human development indicators particularly in the five years preceding the report’s publication.

In other words, this approach reifies the individual and household’s ability to participate effectively in markets and enjoy the marginal rewards from such efforts and social investments in education and labor market policies (e.g. Barrientos 2009; Hulme and Shepherd 2003). Hulme and Shepherd (2003) argue that such an approach conceives poverty as only among those groups whom

⁷ Indigence is defined as an individual’s incapacity to afford the basic food basket (UNDP 2016a, 102).

the market can ‘liberate’ through further market-opening instruments, and no other types of support or institutional changes that address the economic structures and political institutions that reproduce poverty and require longer-term changes. These perspectives show the differences between the chronic poor and the transient poor – the former focuses on those groups whose life chances are stymied due to long periods of cyclical and even inter-generational poverty compared to those experiencing a temporary condition with the expectation of imminent improvements (Hulme and Shepherd 2003). In this respect, associating purchasing power with economic vulnerability reducing the structural dimensions of poverty to consumption aligned with the World Bank’s emphasis on growth. These contradictions arise from the alliance between various measures that have emerged in development economics in recent history (Cammack 2017; Felice 2016). It also does not consider the role of household, community and other spheres of productive activity, especially through public funding and leadership of economic activity. According to Cammack (2017), this perspective has been widely by World Bank analyses, which entrenches the idea that people need to be whipped into shape in order to compete in markets and enlarge their consumption and employment choices with minimal levels of compensation. This formulation also diminishes any possibility of chronic poverty being addressed linked to those with minimal or no changes for economic and social mobility because they are structurally limited by the nature of the social relations that generate poverty itself (Green and Hulme 2005; Selwyn 2018).

This no doubt is associated with the structural conditions of production beyond market consumption and exchange (see next section), that is, the structure of economies, their historical antecedents and how domestic and international forces may lock economies into certain paths. Such notions are more associated with the PES framework outlined above and more generally with structuralism. The CDHR’s line of argument is thus: that people are poor because there is little growth, and there is little growth because of a lack of market participation. Supposedly, because

private enterprises and individuals have not made optimal use of markets, or possess malfunctioning markets, low levels of competitiveness and poverty prevail. It would appear that this analysis may depict the CARICOM experience in such a fatalistic way has certainly not advanced with the potential policy shifts and theoretical flexibility of the structural school or tradition. This point is further reinforced in the Report:

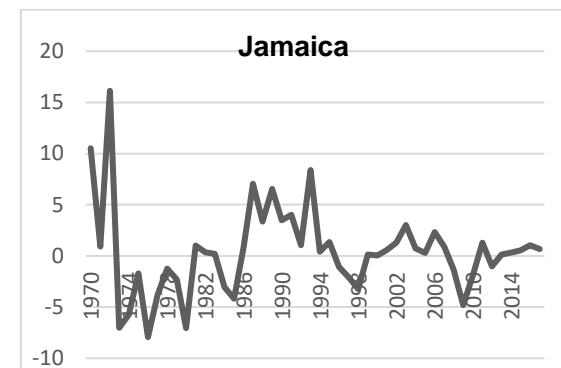
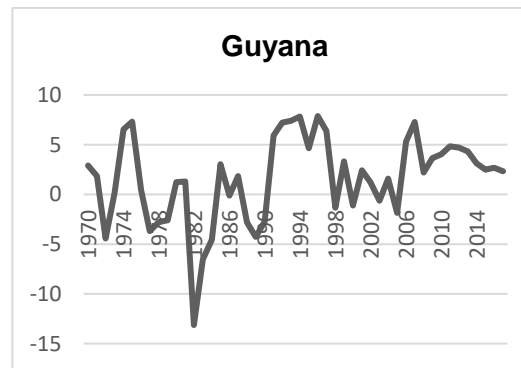
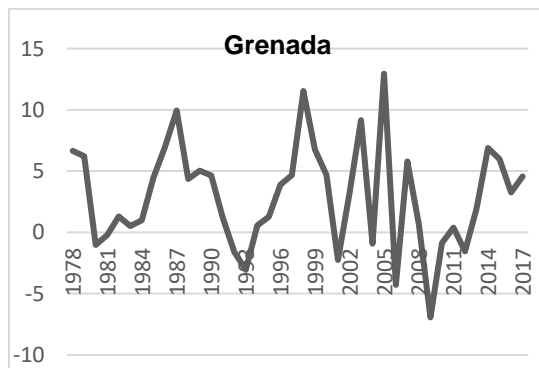
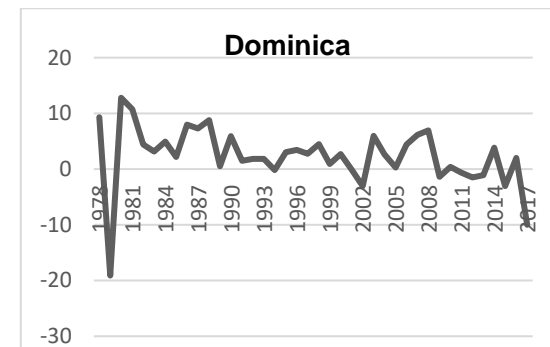
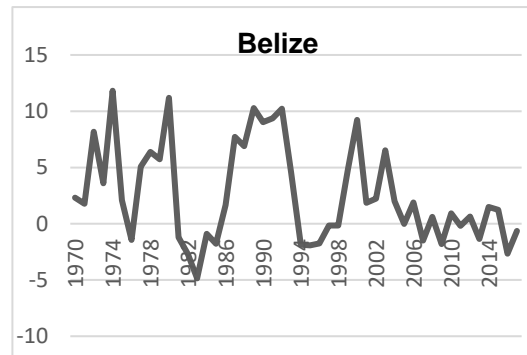
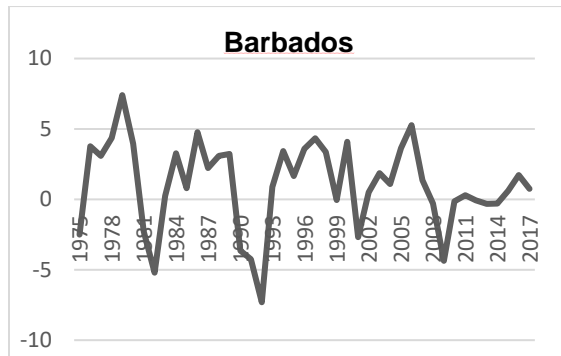
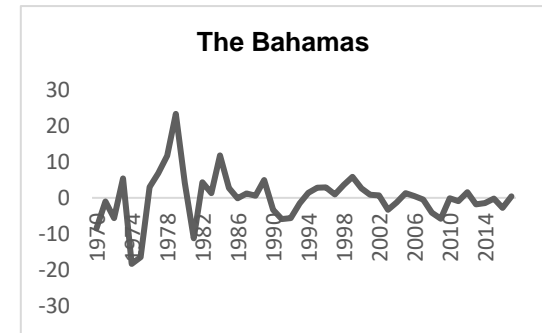
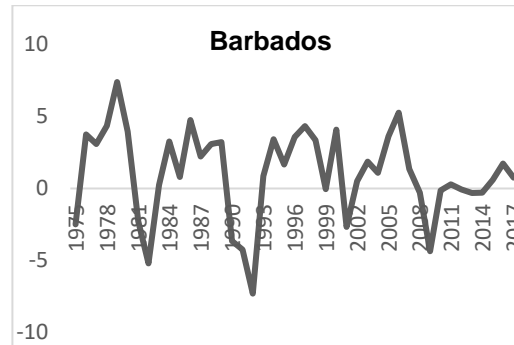
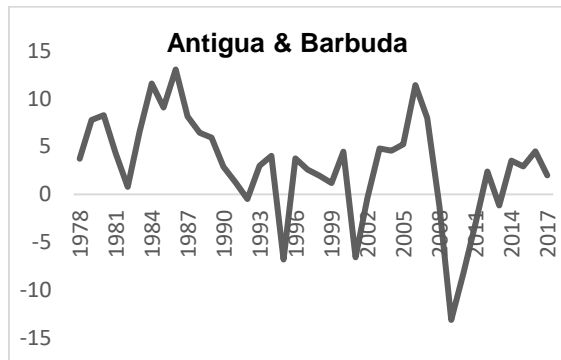
The new growth paradigm should give prominence to the knowledge that economic growth is enhanced by multidimensional progress while not ignoring the important role of economic growth in enabling multidimensional progress. Faster and more stable economic growth is fostered by multidimensional progress and synchronously enables multidimensional progress (UNDP 2016, 130).

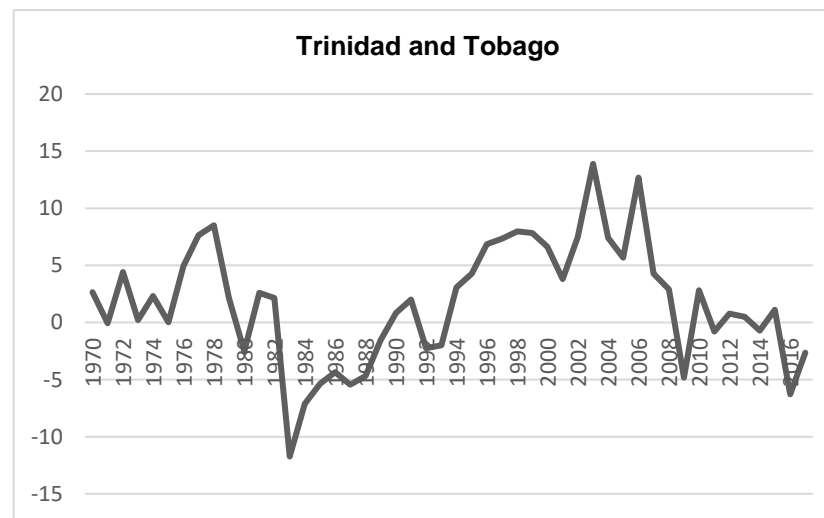
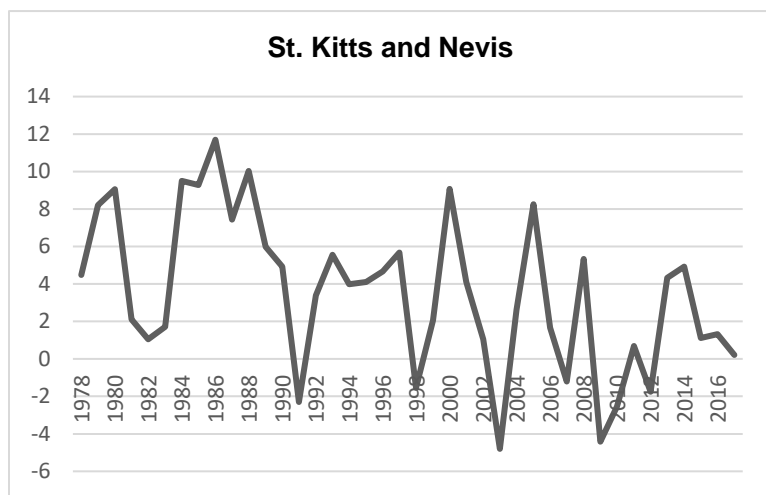
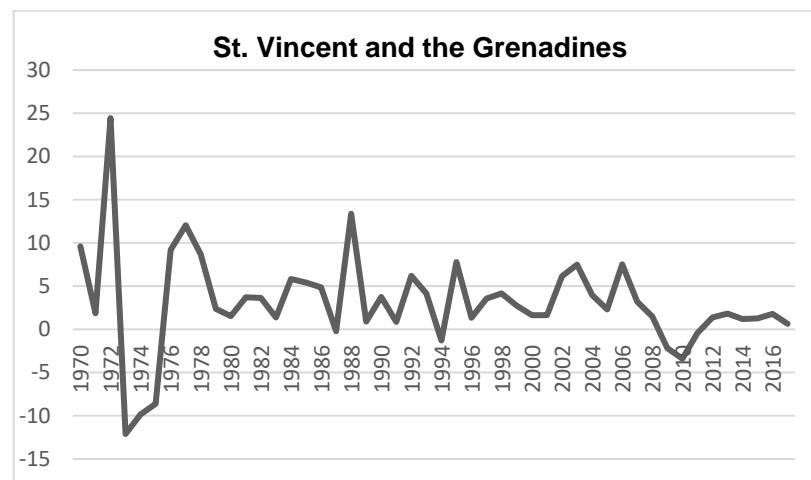
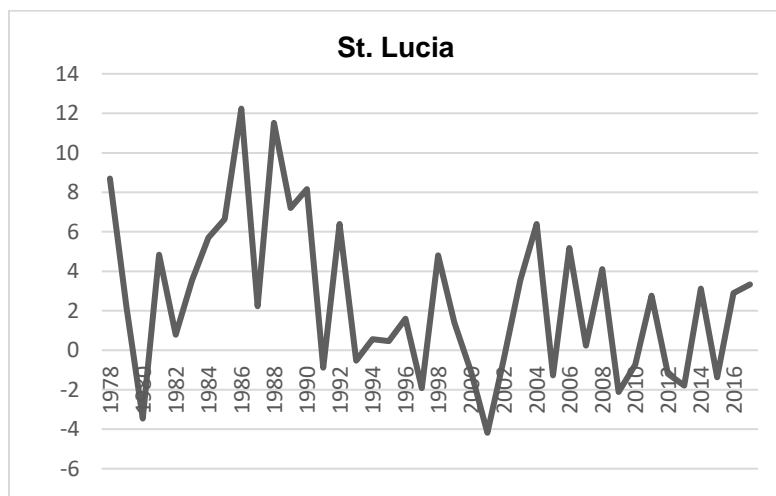
Inequality almost seems serendipitous, as there is no explanation about its determinants or sources (Whitfield 2012), while there is some discussion about its effects. This perspective inevitably reflects the ‘trickle-down’ principle, whereby improved social conditions emerge not by any specific force or because of a policy, but by a natural tendency of the growth and economic progress.

In addition, the ‘structural causes’ of unemployment and labor market participation that the report identifies do not acknowledge interdependent historical, socio-political and structural at the level of the world economy (Schincariol et al. 2017). The CHDR first frames the problems facing CARICOM societies, and then explains failures based on national conditions. In other words, the imperative of market expansion as a basis for human development becomes self-reinforcing, and CARICOM countries’ lacklustre performance in the ‘market’ represents a self-evident justification of the current challenges of Caribbean development. The report diverges significantly from the essence of earlier development thinking reviewed above that facilitated understanding problems on their own terms with policy objectives such as inducing structural

changes and employment creation in the economy (for the prevailing conception, see Beuermann et al. 2018). Development is now about expansion of opportunities for both human beings and business firms, and the general subordination of aspects of social life to market relations (Cammack 2017; Amsden 2010; Whitfield 2012). The CHDR explains away issues of mass poverty, lack of structural transformation, narrowing economic alternatives, low growth and limited technological development as a failure to become more competitive in international markets. The volatile growth path of CARICOM countries (see figures 2 and 3) do not take into account the structural realities, dynamics of production and the determinate causes that structuralists understood well.

Figure 2. The pattern of growth in selected CARICOM countries (1970s to present)





Source: World Development Indicators, data.worldbank.org,
 Accessed May 2019

In spite of overall decline in the rates of economic and productivity growth in the region in recent years (see figures above), especially over the last decade in light of the global crisis, there have been periods of “growth acceleration” in some countries. Werker (2013) identified periods in the economic growth across the region, when some countries showed some level of sustained growth of more than 6 per cent over an extended period of time (eight years). They include: Antigua and Barbuda 1978-1991; The Bahamas 1963-1971, 1978-1986; Barbados 1960 to 1972 ; Belize 1966 to 2006 ; Dominica 1979 to 1988 ; Grenada 1981 to 1991 ; St Kitts and Nevis 1981 to 1993 ; Saint Lucia 1988 to 1996 (growth rate exceeded 10 % during 1982-1990); St Vincent and the Grenadines 1980 to 1990 ; Trinidad and Tobago 1973 to 1982, 1995-2009 (Werker 2013, 26–29).

Production

On the question of production, the CHDR limits much of its analysis to the role of foreign investment. It acknowledges that labor market outcomes are based upon the type of employment and the contribution of foreign investment in expanding the capital stock. Additionally, the current fiscal/financial woes of many CARICOM countries have been depicted as another reason to woo foreign investment to restore the growth process. The report makes this clear:

‘Foreign direct investment can contribute to economic growth by increasing the stock of productive capital, introducing new and improved technologies, establishing or developing export markets, and introducing new organizational systems within the business sector’ (UNDP 2016: 136).

According to the CHDR, it is necessary to lay a sound foundation for future growth by harnessing innovation in economic sectors through economic diversification and cost efficiency. To do this, one must achieve international competitiveness through fiscal reforms and completion of the

CARICOM economic integration agenda (UNDP 2016: 25) on neoliberal economic terms. The report does not refer to how firms or public institutions generate or utilize rents for expanding productive capacities. This is unsurprising, given the lack of policy attention that such human development reports and goals have paid to production matters more generally (Chang 2014). The notion that foreign investment serves to address the major structural weaknesses of the economy have not been borne by recent evidence, and has in part resulted in diminished production capability (Grazzi and Pietrobelli 2017). Empirical studies also show that foreign investment by themselves have not translated into technology spill-overs, and improvements in technological capability in new sectors in the CARICOM region (Barclay 2015; ECLAC 2017).

According to ECLAC reports, foreign investment flows in the sub-region reached as high as 10 per cent of gross domestic product totalling US\$ 6.027 billion in 2014 (CEPAL 2015). Trinidad and Tobago topped the island nations with 23 per cent of inward flows relative to GDP, the majority of which went to its hydrocarbon sector. The Bahamas, in addition to the Eastern CARICOM territories received the majority of investment in the tourism sector, while capital inflows to Guyana, Jamaica, and Belize/Suriname were predominated by gold mining, telecommunications/transport, and hydrocarbons respectively. These dynamics are intertwined with and create tensions in generating externally propelled economies that have some degree of dependence on foreign markets to generate growth and income (Best and Levitt 1969; Couriel and Correa 2018; Kemp-Benedict et al. 2018). The level of economic performance that is generated depends on the interdependencies of a number of factors including the internal structure of the society, its current level of development, the rent management system in place, and the degree of institutional power by domestic and transnational elites (Sprague-Sigaldo, 2017; Perry 2018). In turn, this affects the productivity-generating capacity of the economy, a feature that was understood by structuralists.

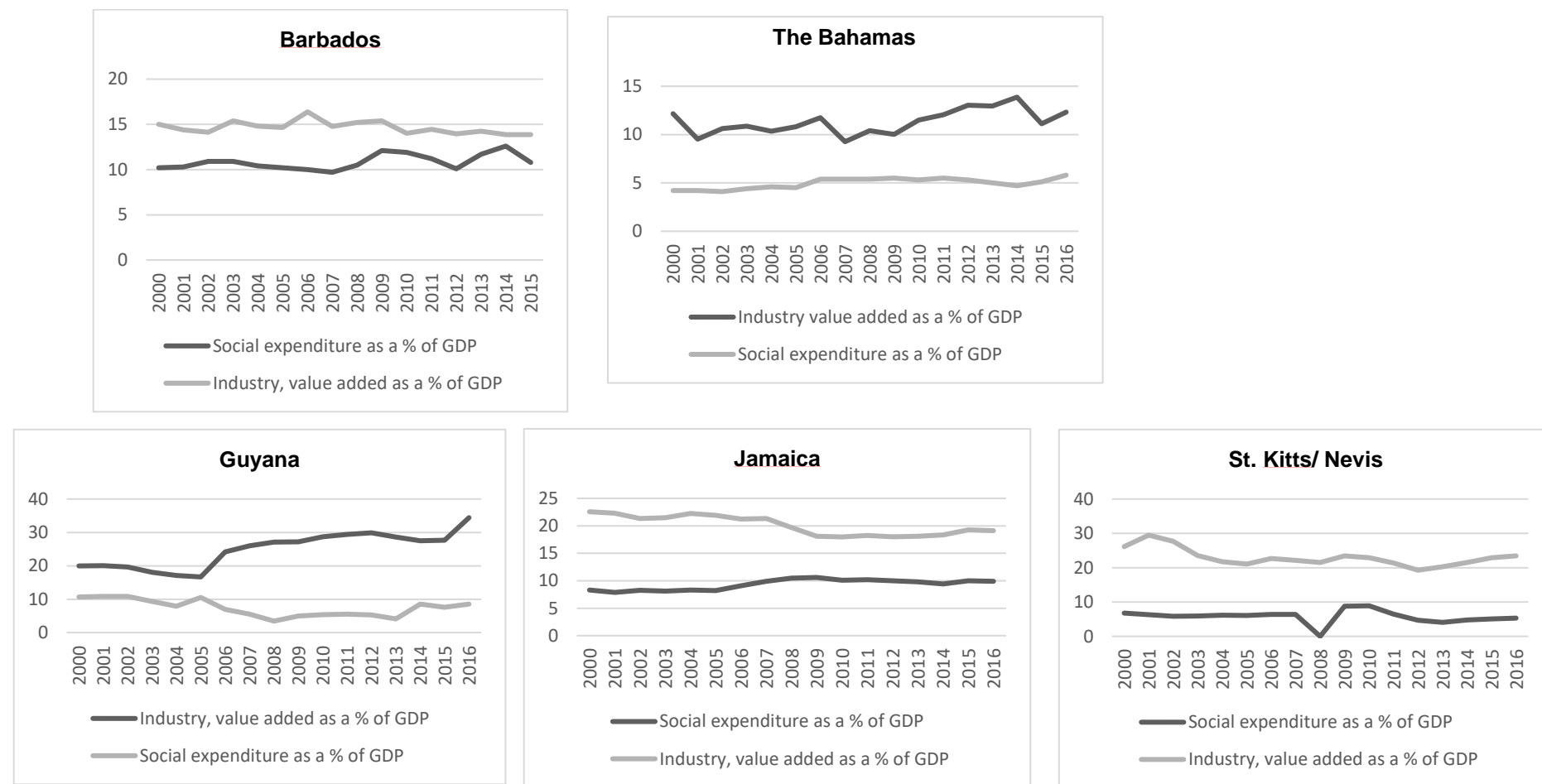
Moreover, these factors are expressed in the structural heterogeneity and sharp fluctuations in growth of CARICOM economies especially seen during the period of market liberalisation. The evidence also shows certain dualism in the economy, as there has been shifts to slow-growth sectors especially services, and a high concentration of employment in informal sectors, as industrial production has slowed in several countries with a high dependence on transnational corporations (CEPAL 2015; ECLAC 2017). This structural heterogeneity is manifested by lower contributions of industry to growth, while increased supply-side expenditures in health and education over time – despite the lower levels of human development and higher poverty experienced in the CARICOM over the five years up to 2016. The CHDR characterizes the macro-economic situation by under-developed labor markets, chronic indebtedness, high costs of food imports, lack of economic diversification, high energy costs, and so on (UNDP 2016a). However, it does not mention or analyse how these CARICOM economies have come to be so dependent on external markets for so many of their goods and to generate growth. The report offers institutional solutions to these myriad problems that are anchored in public-private partnerships that may reinforce forms of political clientelism. Relatedly, technological fixes are promoted as a necessary solution. The structure of labor markets has also come into relief where public employment programmes are seen as crowding out private sector employment for political purposes rather than efficiency gains. As a result, policy is seen not to address structural problems, but individuals' capacity constraints to participate in labor, financial and invest in products to improve competitiveness (Cammack 2017) outside of a social structure. Similarly, entrepreneurship, skills and education programmes that attempt to build individual agency are favoured. From this perspective, collective capabilities fostered through governing institutions and income distribution linked to economic productivity are not well examined (Cimoli et al. 2017).

Accordingly, the quality of human development is affected by the change in productive

activity, the sectoral nature of production and quality of employment generated by structural changes (Amsden 2010; Andreoni and Chang 2017; Chang 2014). The quality of such changes has been increasingly represented by some decoupling occurring since the early 2000s, until very recently, between industrial contribution to GDP and the expenditures on health and education. Health and education expenditures in this sense are proxies for the conventional human development approach and recognized under the rubric of multidimensional progress in the CHDR. Conversely, I argue that production factors and employment composition have consequences for economic growth more broadly and distributions of income and wealth. Development economists long noted the structure of economic production as causes of divergent development outcomes, which may be changed through political intervention (Prebisch 1950), but they often paid limited attention to quality of life factors such as health and education (Stewart 2019).

Even though the CHDR notes that lower growth may be responsible for weak employment and labor outcomes, it does not indicate that causality may run in the other direction. In other words, low levels of employment in a diversity of sectors of productive activity may affect the growth pattern; it also does not illustrate why. This section offers an explanation in lieu of the limited treatment of production and the sectoral nature of production with respect to finance, technology and the nature of industry and the link to health and education expenditures. Even as industrial output has stagnated, expenditures on health and education have been relatively increasing. This relationship has direct consequences for the quality of employment and the labor market. In this manner, structural theorists have also already noted that supply-side approaches to education / training initiatives do not automatically lead to improved developmental outcomes such as better employment opportunities (Amsden 2010). While improved education and health may support a better quality of life overall, the manner in which these public goods are delivered may not support broader productive transformation and employment opportunities in and of themselves.

Figure 3. The relationship between industrial production and social expenditures (% of GDP) in select CARICOM countries



Source: CEPALSTAT database for social expenditures data <https://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english>, and World Development Indicators for industry value added data.

Figure 3 above in this way shows the relationship between industrial production and social expenditures, based on available data in CARICOM countries. While the trend in certain countries show some relative decoupling between industrial output and social expenditures, especially in Guyana and Jamaica since 2000, and in the Bahamas and St. Kitts and Nevis after 2009. This trend may indicate some form of hollowing out of the productive sector and the decreasing capacity for these economies over time evinced by lower levels of output. In Barbados, this trend reverses as the economy entered a period of austerity in 2009. Indeed, this shows that CARICOM countries have focused to some degree on social investment, while there may be some neglect of production expansion beyond staple service sectors, especially during the time of the Millennium Development Goals. We indicate here the specific relationship between these governments to dedicate greater levels of expenditure to health, education and housing, while the economy have shown limited productive expansion overall.

Environment

While the level of productive development of an economy is linked to the possibility to address various forms of inequality, the spectre of climate change and the disruption of extreme weather events have implications for production-centred human development. The disproportionate impacts to the effects of climate change and ecological disaster on economies and social groups affect their ability to adapt and achieve a sustainable future (Diffenbaugh and Burke 2019). The CHDR acknowledges the ‘intensity of natural and human-made disasters has increased dramatically over the last decades, impairing human capabilities and threatening human development everywhere’ that is especially felt in the CARICOM sub-region (UNDP 2016a, 7). This section is therefore based on *Chapter 4: Economic transformation, environmentally sustainable growth and role in multidimensional progress*. In tandem with social and economic

vulnerability, ‘environmental vulnerability’ incurs costs and losses in terms of human lives, physical and productive assets and infrastructure and the productive sectors in the region especially in agriculture and tourism. It then diverts its attention to proposals around ‘development finance’ to address these multiple vulnerabilities, but does not quite lay out the developmental context in which these multiple challenges are constructed (Brooks, Grist, and Brown 2009). While the economic cost of climate change is important for these small economies, such crude numerical data do not capture the qualitative effects. This relates to the loss of human life, interruption of public services, and the ensuing negative impact on the quality of life, including family disruption due to migration, increased threat of disease, limited access to health and education services, deteriorated infrastructure, and consequently the increased incidence of poverty due to the loss of livelihoods (Heger et al. 2008).

Since the mid to late 1990s, the frequency of storms and hurricanes have doubled in absolute terms, while the damage have also increased considerably with 2004 holding the position of the most destructive year when hurricane Ivan severely devastated the eastern and northern Caribbean⁸. Increasingly, more severe weather patterns like droughts and hurricanes are visiting the CARICOM countries in more sustained ways (ECLAC 2019), especially affecting its main productive sectors such as tourism, agriculture and mining (Bishop and Payne 2012; Mejia 2016; Mycoo 2018). According to the report on the costs of climate change in the CARICOM region, the effects due to increased hurricane damages, loss of tourism revenue, and infrastructure damages, under the business-as-usual are projected at about \$22 billion annually by 2050 and \$46 billion by 2100 (Bueno et al. 2008). This represents between 10 and 22 per cent of the region wide economy.

⁸Hurricane Ivan caused damages amounting to approximately US\$3.1 billion, the extent of which was equal to about 10 per cent and more than 200 per cent in Grenada as a proportion of GDP (Heger et al. 2008).

Based on conservative estimates, the costs in terms of losses and damages⁹ in financial are significant. CARICOM countries have faced the brunt: Haiti after Hurricane Matthew in 2016 (US\$ 2.7 billion), the Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian in 2019 (US\$ 3.4 billion losses), Barbuda and Dominica after hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 (US\$ 155 million and US\$ 1.31 billion respectively) (IDB 2019; ECLAC 2018b; 2018a). These climate-induced disasters are all connected through common experiences of islandness, ecosystem exposure, slavery, colonialism, and racialized marginalization within the global economy (Moulton and Machado 2019). During the period 2000 and 2015, between 33 percent and 200 percent of the economic output of CARICOM island states was devastated (World Bank 2017). In 2016, the average annual loss due to successive and destructive hurricanes in the CARICOM region amounted to US\$ 835 million (World Bank 2016). Despite these significant losses and continuing ongoing damage, the international community has been unwilling to provide sufficient for the costs associated with adaptation required by CARICOM governments (Robinson and Dornan 2017). In addition, no dedicated international financial mechanism for loss and damages due to anthropogenic climate change current exists (Gewirtzman et al. 2018).

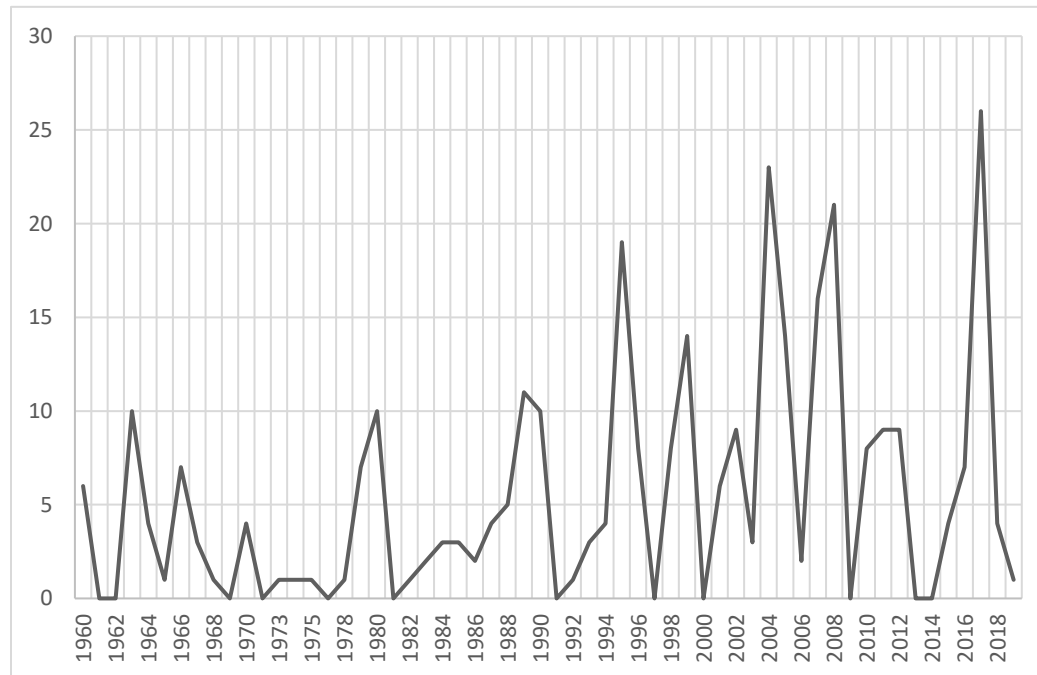
In September 2017 alone, successive storms hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated a number of the CARICOM countries and associated island territories, causing widespread damage to Barbuda, part of the country Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, and Dominica and St. Kitts (Moulton and Machado 2019). The total estimated¹⁰ cost to infrastructure damage, productive sectors and to the social system in these countries was approximately US \$5.4 billion (ECLAC 2018c). Dominica witnessed 100 per cent loss of its crops and extensive destruction to productive

⁹ Under the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC), loss and damage refer to the specific category of irreversible losses (e.g. loss of life, species, land) and costly damages (e.g. destroyed infrastructure) associated with the adverse impacts of climate change that can be considered complementary to adaptation (Gewirtzman et al. 2018).

¹⁰ This figure also includes the British Virgin Islands.

vegetation, and loss of livestock, while an additional 90 per cent of building structures were damaged, where approximately 6 per cent of houses were severely damaged and 15 per cent destroyed. Antigua and Barbuda experienced a combined loss of physical assets and productive sector disruption, equivalent to roughly 9 per cent the country's GDP in 2016 while Barbuda was declared uninhabitable by the government authorities (ECLAC 2018c). These extreme events and the losses occasioned by them show disparate effects of climate crisis and the uneven relationship between the CARICOM region and the world economy.

Figure 4. Number of hurricanes and storms in the CARICOM region



Source: EM-DAT: The Emergency Events Database - Universite catholique de Louvain (UCL) www.emdat.be

Even though the more Southern nations like Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago are not significantly exposed due to their location, according to the Emergency Events database¹¹, they

¹¹ See EM DAT Database at https://www.emdat.be/emdat_db/

have in recent years been subject to acute flooding and internal calamity. Trinidad and Tobago saw massive flooding incidents in 2018, affecting 150,000 people, and causing damage equivalent to US\$3.7 million. In 2015 and 2017, Guyana experienced severe flooding incidents that affected 202,274 people in both years, about a quarter of the total population. To increase climate resilience, however, the CHDR focuses largely on market-mediated initiatives, linked to improving which it views as critical to improving the region's international competitiveness. For example, the report states:

The expansion of the share of renewable energies in the energy mix represents an opportunity both for decreasing the external dependence, and simultaneously creating new, green employment opportunities within the Caribbean economies (UNDP 2016a, p. 158).

In response, the CHDR recommends expanding and facilitating financial mechanisms, technological fixes and new incentives to address issues of environmental sustainability and fossil fuel dependence. Certainly, these proposals should be considered against the structural nature of global financing arrangements, especially in renewables, and ongoing investment-state relations that have largely been skewed against CARICOM countries (Atteridge et al. 2017; Atteridge and Savvidou 2019).

In addition, the report follows current policy measures linked to financing and technical support arrangements from agencies like the Inter-American Development Bank, among others, including global climate funding mechanisms, that continue to emphasize improving the banking and business climate, revitalization and investment in new exportable products linked to the 'blue economy', tourism, agriculture, culture and the creative economy. It also reinforces greater efforts towards attracting external financial capital. In this sense, these are not new recommendations. They have contributed to maintaining the current dependent position that increases these states' vulnerability to vicissitudes in international capital and trading markets

(Dagher 2019; Sealey-Huggins 2017). These proposals in effect do not adequately address the structural relationship with the global economy that Caribbean plantation scholars laid out. These proposals may as well as the opposite effect of further deepening fiscal crises, worsening inequality and environmental crises, as well as narrowing possibilities to develop a productive economy that addresses the basic needs of the region's people to improve their adaptive capacity to endure external shocks.

Conclusion – towards new development possibilities in the CARICOM region

This assessment of the current situation of Caribbean development draws upon the debates around structuralism and political economy of development to show its continued relevance, by assessing the analytical, methodological content and associated policy conclusion of the 2016 Caribbean Human Development Report. This contribution puts forward a production-centred human development approach and contends that CARICOM economies are increasingly structurally complex and diverse and should be understood within the context of global economic transformations. While the CHDR argues for a more market-oriented perspective of poverty, I show that poverty and inequality in the region cannot be solely framed as a concern of low growth, constrained consumption and exchange of goods, but rooted in the structural conditions of the political economy and economic production. Relatedly, by focusing on human development as multidimensional progress focussing on health and education, the CHDR has marginalized considerations of employment and production. As erstwhile agrarian-based economies, the class structure has emphasized racialized exploitative relationships. Since the last 50 to 60 years of independence, these economies have moved from agriculture to minerals, oil and gas, tourism services, and to a lesser extent, finance which are all volatile and income elastic sectors dependent on global markets. Thus, the quality of employment and pattern of growth are further defined by

this transition and exposure, and characterized in certain cases, especially Guyana, Jamaica, and St. Kitts, by certain trend towards decoupling of social provisioning and productive capability. This insight is essential as it calls into question the conventional human development approach that focuses on market-mediated solutions and competitiveness indicators, and not on deepening productive endeavours that can potentially transform the political and economic trajectories of CARICOM societies.

Finally, this contribution also challenges the temptation of many such policy studies to give pre-determined answers or solutions, without consideration of the nuanced political contexts with myriad social actors that have specific organizational capabilities and power, public sectors with uneven institutional capabilities, differentiated developmental needs, and objectives to meeting collective societal goals. It thus draws attention to the structural, technical and socio-political rigidities that underlie poverty, production challenges and environmental vulnerability in the region. The proclivity for powerful institutional actors such as regional development banks to over prescribe and under-theorise which must be resisted. Such approaches pay less attention to dynamics of change in these contexts and reify market-led governance approaches. There are increasingly valid historical examples in the CARICOM region of state-led policy alternatives and experimentation (Perry 2018) that could inspire new research and generate new policy ideas and approaches. This assessment thus offers this starting point for (re)assessing the region's peculiar development circumstances that may excavate new possibilities to be considered around the issues pertinent to this report. With the multidimensional challenges the region faces, new analyses must draw on sound and relevant frameworks and diverse intellectual capacities for CARICOM countries to have any chance of realising a sustainable future.

Notes on contributor

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