

Preface

The Caribbean, a magnet for voyages of discovery over the centuries from Europe, Asia, and Africa to the “new world,” has often been viewed as a crucible of globalization. In this time of turbulence in the global economy and political landscape – protectionism, isolationism, terrorism – as the North Atlantic powers turn “inward” and the geo-economic axis shifts in a new era of great power competition, the Caribbean, always on the edge of geography, is at a policy standstill pondering which way and how to turn.

Always an open society where harmony and discord work together, the Caribbean Sea has been a source of hidden wealth and a place that peoples from all continents call home. From Castro’s Cuban revolution and 160 years before in Haiti’s black rebellion for true independence, the region aptly reflects the dictum that “no island is an island.”

Now, in a period of tense stability in the Caribbean space, the old premise that inspired development and diplomacy thinking has become brittle in the face of new global threats facing the Caribbean in its quest to move from survival to sustainability. Can the Caribbean stand up to recurring risks ahead and forge a confident pathway for sustainable development? Will the Caribbean heed the urgings of UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed to make our institutions “fit for purpose and effective implementation” and “maximize this time for global action”?¹

The Caribbean on the Edge traces the ideas that evolved in development and diplomacy over the last decade in policy and academic circles, points to the missing gaps in data and strategy, and identifies the way towards a new relevance in analytical leadership. In a time of persistent uncertainty, fragile eco-structures, the politics of “populism,” and limits in institutional leadership, this work sets the analytical baseline for a road map to the changing of globalization for the countries on the edge of history in the Caribbean Sea.

This edge was succinctly described by P.J. Patterson, former prime minister of Jamaica: “Everywhere, there is a growing acceptance that the old and traditional style of governance is obsolete ... And the new order for which we yearn has yet to be established as a result of constant cataclysmic changes virtually with each passing day ... There is still an ongoing search to create a brand-new paradigm for the exercise of political power and the management of national economies.”² The more recent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Caribbean countries has reinforced this assertion, challenging even more frontally the theoretical frameworks and policy action necessary for the survival and resilience of Caribbean society and economy.

The analytics of development sought to close the gap between political logic and economic logic, and in so doing increased the political stress levels in governance and management of the nation state. Analytical tools to measure and understand the issues of inequality and poverty were tested, and opened “an intellectual bridge to fill the gap between expectations and performance,” in Patterson’s words (xii). Political stress testing was added to the indicators of development indices, as politics was increasingly seen as an obstacle to Caribbean advancement. With the region’s societies being open ones, in various manifestations, and in the ever-changing global politics of today’s era, the practice of diplomacy was challenged simultaneously on several fronts within the region and beyond, generating a fertile arena for students of diplomacy of countries on the edge.

Countries on the edge, particularly if they are small, are often in a state of crisis – subject to systemic external shocks, environmental risks, and vulnerabilities – but generally do perform well on quality-of-life indicators and the promise of stability and serenity. *Crisis and Promise: Politics and Convergence* (2015) is the title of my book on this theme, in which noted scholar Paula Morgan wrote in the preface: “the issues and contestations are common to the new nations which climbed out of imperialism’s early experiment in global capitalism half a century ago to craft viable parameters of nation statehood ... [a] comprehensive offering ... [that] combines bedrock pragmatism with a fierce insistence on the higher ground and transcendent aspirations and ideals.”³ This book explores the notion that “leadership and institutions” matter in the performance matrix of Caribbean countries, focusing on the promise of convergence of the wider region to secure the economic space for sustaining resilience in an ever-changing world order.

Shifting the Frontiers: An Action Framework for the Future of the Caribbean,⁴ resulting from the Forum on the Future of the Caribbean (2015) – aptly entitled “Disruptive Thinking, Bold Action, and Practical

Outcomes” – detailed uplift approaches for models of Caribbean development. Professor Clement Sankat stirred the imagination of the large audience of mostly young scholars in a “what if” articulation of what the future could look like if certain policy choices were adopted: “what if we removed every barrier to trade, what if we ensured the free movement of people, what if we created a Union of Caribbean State ... what if we build a robust production capability that opens itself to the wider world ... what if, collectively, we subscribe to a Caribbean Future Vision?” Vice-chancellor Hilary Beckles called for “rekindling the revolution” and a return to our philosophical source, while Professor Amitav Acharya disturbed the orthodox thinking on diplomacy by articulating “the view from a multiplex world.” This gathering inspired me to begin building the analytical blocks that led to the chapters in *The Caribbean on the Edge*.

This book is about the policy analytics that shape that different order. Tracing the evolution of the school of thought that influences policy prescriptions over time, the chapters cover ideas that shape the framework, identifies the missing links in thinking, and points out pathways in analytical leadership on issues of development, governance, and diplomacy. In so doing, it sets the stage for designing a framework that is aligned to current realities as the region rides the huge tidal wave washing ashore from the Caribbean Sea.

The early chapters place the policy analysis in a historical context and identify the recurring themes of trade-off between regionalism and sovereignty, managing political tensions, and strategies to expand the region’s economic space. These themes remain relevant in today’s environment, and the chapters provide insights on how to shift the paradigm to expand the reach of Caribbean economies. In doing so, they identify the missing link of politics in development and spell out how that remains a key gap as one negotiates the future ahead. Later, the challenge of reconciling political and economic logics is considered, with its implications for policy initiatives in energy, finance, and growth across generations and demography.

The focus then shifts to examine the development experience in different regions with lessons for the Caribbean development integration process, inclusive growth, and the waves of reforms in institutions and strategy. The issues of diplomacy, as it affects the Caribbean, in global governance, multilateralism, and international finance, are developed as a prelude to the challenges of the future.

In looking at the years ahead, policy analysts will be considering the key issues of the limits of integration, the scope for convergence, the quest by small countries to capture space in global markets, and

the perennial issues of financing of development for macroeconomic to structural demands in order to design a framework for the future. In looking at structural change, the book offers evidence-based analysis of financing with reference to income inequality and higher education. These topics are linked to Piketty's recent work on capital in the twenty-first century,⁵ and provide an opportunity for a fresh approach to an old challenge that has always been a source of tension in the political history of nations.

The concluding chapters apply a "political stress" frame in the world of diplomacy for small states in the changing world order of things. These chapters look at the phenomenon of global populism, the link between domestic politics and foreign policy, and the leverage of small states in today's time, where multilateralism is not central in big power rivalries. The challenges and opportunities for small states in Europe and the rest of the world provide the Caribbean with lessons in navigating pathways for a resilient diplomacy. The chapters also call for a strategic recalibration to regional diplomacy, and raises the issue of permanent crisis management facing small economies of the world as they search for economic confidence and an international voice.

The book ends, in the epilogue, by citing the "the lazy orthodoxies prevailing ... [the] tectonic changes around us ... [and] the scope to unlock the 'policy paralysis'" threatening the Caribbean, and the need for political stress-testing in the analytics of the tense stability in the region, the rising expectations of a society facing more inequalities and poverty, and limited space for global action. In a timely sense, *The Caribbean on the Edge* is a fitting companion to my next edited publication, *Frontiers, Flows, and Frameworks: Resetting Caribbean Policy Analysis in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic*,⁶ which links the analytics of development in this volume to the policy agenda in the years ahead, giving expression to the tectonic changes of this time.

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