



Good Governance in Caribbean Westminster Democracies – An Achievable Goal or Merely Wishful Thinking?

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Two Important Quotes

- “[All too, should bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable; for] the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression.”



Quotes – Cont.

- “That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part.”
- Thomas Jefferson – Founding father of the American Constitution and author of the Declaration of Independence.



What do they mean?

- Statements are a measure of success of a democracy –
- Good measure of a democracy is how it treats the minority (political groups, etc.)
- Another measure is how involved, consensual, participatory that democracy is – how does it facilitate grass roots democratic participation.



What is Development?

- Development – Real Development promotes the largest measure of sustainable happiness fulfillment (welfare) for the largest number of people.
- Development – is a shorthand for Improved/Maximized Quality of Life.



What about Good Governance?

- Good Governance – a series of decisions that produce targeted policies that are the result of deliberative, sometimes painstaking consensual processes, focused on results; OR
- A measure of the QUALITY of political decision-making!



Development and Good Governance?

- Inextricably Linked.
- Development is the inevitable, inexorable OUTCOME of carefully targeted policies, i.e. good decision-making.
- Not an accident.



Why is Constitutional Reform Important?

- Constitutional Structures influence and determine Quality of Decision-making in a country.
- Poor structures promote poor decision-making.
- Good structures promote good decision-making.



Constitutional Fundamentals

- Transparency
- Accountability.
- Restraint.
- Participation.
- Consensus.



Why?

- Transparency and accountability are necessary/essential to strong constitutional democracy, but NOT sufficient.
- Jefferson's comments show – other conditions critical.

How does our system measure up?



- Not well -
- Not transparent or accountable.
- Too much power concentrated in the hands of too few.
- Does not promote consensus.
- Inadequate checks and balances.
- Requires an abdication of responsibility by average citizens until elections
- Institutionalizes political discrimination against the minority party and supporters.



Caution!!!

- Personal view, unlikely to be shared by regional legal academics or British trained lawyers.
- Having participated for the last five years in a national constitutional reform process, am convinced.
- Widespread view of many St. Lucians.



The view of average St. Lucians.

- System is fundamentally broken.
- St. Lucians feels profoundly alienated from machinery of government, i.e. they feel powerless, dispossessed (of political power)
- “Window shoppers” of constitutional framework.
- Feel unable to influence decision-making in “real time.”
- Want increased opportunities to participate in decision-making.



The Problem?

- Constitution centralizes too much power in the hands of Cabinet and the PM.
- Places insufficient constraints on the exercise of executive authority.



The Problems – Cont.

- System does not encourage or promote transparency, actually promotes secrecy.
- Executive can only be sanctioned at the point of an election.
- In interim, the damage caused can be irreparable.



Comparison to Illustrate.

- Compare our system, (British) with the American system of Government.
- US system characterized by real transparency, accountability, etc.
- Real checks and balances.
- Truly participatory – Can not work without consensus.
- US system places emphasis on systems and structures, less on people.



Our system?

- Reduced to simplest form – “majority rules” = “might makes right.”
- Another word for “mob rule.”
- British model of government is the quintessence of this philosophy.
- British model is “winner takes all.”
- Not terribly democratic at all.



The Problems – Cont.

- Our System promotes tribalization, disagreement, NOT consensus.
- Good government in our system depends on personal characteristics of the people we elect.
- Good people – good government.
- Bad people – poor corrupt government.
- No systems to restrain executive authority.



Conclusion?

- Weak democracy.
- British system is inadequate for our circumstances – but good for Britain.
- Does not promote transparency, accountability, consensus, participation, restraint.
- Does not promote good governance or good decision-making.
- In dire need of overhaul!!



The Answer?

- We MUST reform to address weaknesses.



THANKS!

- Questions?