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REGIONALISM AMONG THE SMALL STATES: THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of regionalism in small states through a case study of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). As a project of regional integration involving predominantly small island developing states, CARICOM is a key instrument for pursuing economic integration, political unity, and social progress in the Caribbean. The study explores the historical background under which CARICOM developed, the organizational framework of CARICOM, and the motivational factors behind the initiative of member states to pursue regional cooperation. It also analyses critically the possibility of further integration, particularly in the areas of trade, security, governance, and sustainable development. The research, however, cites long-standing issues such as economic disparity among member states, low institutional capacity, political fragmentation, and external economic vulnerabilities. Through using a qualitative analysis of policy documents, academic writing, and local publications, the study accentuates the nature of both strengths and weaknesses of CARICOM as a model of small states' regionalism. Lastly, the study argues that while CARICOM has tremendous potential to advance the collective agenda of its members, such potential can only be realized by consistent political will, institution-building reforms, and effective adaptation to international economic transformations.

Keywords: *Regionalism, Small States, CARICOM, Caribbean Integration, Economic Cooperation, Governance Challenges.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

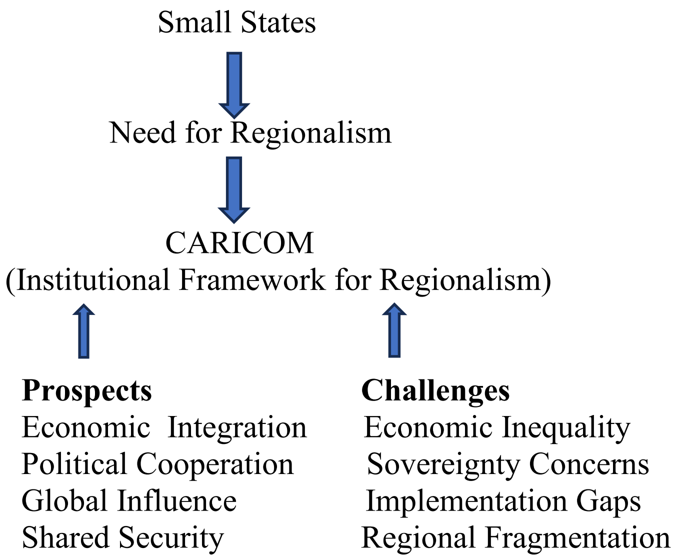
Regionalism has increasingly become a necessary strategy for small states in their quest for collective survival, economic progress, and a stronger voice within the global system. Due to their resource limitations, small domestic markets, and vulnerability to external shocks, these states turn to regional cooperation to amplify their presence in the international arena and pursue shared development goals (Bishop, 2013; Shaw, 2020). The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) serves as an exemplary model of this policy, showcasing both the potential and challenges of regional integration for small island developing states. Established in 1973, CARICOM represents a unified response aimed at enhancing economic cooperation, coordinating foreign policy, promoting functional cooperation, and fostering regional solidarity (Payne & Sutton, 2019).

As a regional bloc, CARICOM reflects the shared aspirations of its member countries to rise above as a single entity the structural disadvantage they face. Through initiatives like the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), CARICOM has sought to encourage the free movement of goods, services, capital, and persons within member states and strengthen economic integration (Hinds, 2018). Furthermore, CARICOM's collective positions in international fora have enabled its members to address common positions using a single voice, pushing key issues common to small states, including worldwide attempts to combat climate change, access to foreign markets, and fair trade practices (Girvan, 2012).

However, while CARICOM is very promising as a small states' regionalism model, its development has been hampered by many persistent challenges. Foremost among these are economic inequalities among member states, low institutional capacity, and the reluctance of some national governments to relinquish fully national sovereignty to integrate more profoundly (Axline, 2015). Additionally, outside economic pressures such as dependence on foreign markets and vulnerability to the vagaries of global financial patterns continue to drain the effectiveness of regional initiatives (Shaw, 2020).

This study explores these challenges and opportunities through relevant international relations theory, empirical Caribbean integration analysis, and assessments of how major international institutions have shaped CARICOM's trajectory. An understanding of these dynamics is important to the evaluation of CARICOM's contribution to sustainable development and successful regional cooperation among small states.

2. MODELLING



Explanation of the Model

a. Small States and the Need for Regionalism

• Regionalism usually becomes a necessity for Small States like the Caribbean because they are usually vulnerable due to:

i. Small population.
ii. Weak economic capacity
iii. Greater vulnerability to external shocks (global market, climate change)

• All these drive the need for regionalism as a survival mechanism to pool resources, strengthen collective bargaining, and foster mutual assistance.

b. CARICOM as the vehicle for Regionalism

•CARICOM (Caribbean Community) is the central institutional framework through which these small states strive:

i. Economic integration (CARICOM Single Market and Economy - CSME)
ii. Political cooperation
iii. International coordination
iv. Common cultural identity

c. Opportunities (Benefits)

- Economic Integration: Encourages free movement of goods, services, and persons; enhances regional trade.
- Political Cooperation: Shared policy stands on international issues.
- Global Influence: Greater bargaining leverage in forums like the WTO, UN.
- Shared Security: Regional security infrastructure, especially in disaster relief and crime prevention.

d. Challenges (Limitations)

- Economic Inequality: Economic imbalances within member states.
- Sovereignty Concerns: Resistance from member states hesitant to surrender national authority.

- Implementation Gaps: Weak enforcement of CARICOM policies.
- Regional Fragmentation: Conflicting allegiances (e.g., OECS vs. CARICOM; separate trade agreements).

Summary

The model sees regionalism in terms of CARICOM as both a necessity and a challenge to the Caribbean small states. Although it offers economic, political, and international benefits, it is hindered by internal disparities, sovereignty issues, and concrete implementation impediments.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) continues to be the leading regional integration organization in the Anglophone Caribbean today, embodying a collective pursuit of economic progress, social cohesion, and political unity among small island developing states (SIDS). Understanding CARICOM's history and structure is necessary to gaining an appreciation of its role in Caribbean governance, regional identity, and international diplomacy. The roots of CARICOM are traced to post-colonial aspirations, and its organization reflects deliberate efforts towards intergovernmental cooperation as well as regional integration.

3. ORIGINS OF CARICOM

i. Historical Foundations

The roots of CARICOM are traced to the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA), established in 1965 with the intent of facilitating free trade among British Caribbean countries. CARIFTA itself resulted from earlier failed political integration attempts, namely the West Indies Federation (1958–1962), which collapsed due to national rivalries and diverging economic interests (Payne & Sutton, 2007). The dissolution of the Federation demonstrated the need for a more flexible form of cooperation based on economic rather than political integration.

It was codified in 1968 between 12 member countries with the primary objective of promoting intra-regional trade. CARIFTA was able to promote trade in manufactured and agricultural goods, but it was later realized that economic integration was insufficient to address the issues of Caribbean states, namely their vulnerability to external economic shocks (Bishop & Payne, 2010).

The idea of transition from an association based on trade towards a broader integration program had the backing of the Williams Doctrine—named after Eric Williams, the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago—who advocated for increased Caribbean integration to foster increased political and economic independence in the post-colonial universe (Girvan, 2012).

ii. The Treaty of Chaguaramas (1973)

Addressing these needs, four of the founding members—Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago—signed the Treaty of Chaguaramas on 4 July 1973 to establish the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) formally. The treaty was signed in Chaguaramas, Trinidad, to signal the replacement of CARIFTA by CARICOM. Unlike CARIFTA, which had no pillars in the middle, CARICOM was formed to consist of three main pillars: economic integration, coordination of foreign policy, and functional cooperation in health, education, and security.

One of the most important innovations in the Treaty was the dream to establish a Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), which sought to build one economic space among member states (Byron & Lewis, 2007). The treaty was an ambitious regionalism project that was political, social, and economic in scope.

Expansion of Membership

From the moment it was founded, CARICOM has grown to 15 full members, 5 associate members, and several observers. Membership has extended beyond Anglophone states to include Suriname (joined in 1995) and Haiti (joined in 2002), a reflection of yearning for wider Caribbean cooperation (Hinds, 2008). The addition of differentiated states, both linguistic and economic, has given greater sway to CARICOM but new integration challenges as well.

Structure of CARICOM

CARICOM's institutional structure is designed to uphold cooperation among member nations and maintain national sovereignty. Its structure is comprised of different principal organs, subsidiary organs, specialized institutions, and affiliated bodies. The multi-level structure reflects the complexity of integrating multiple sovereign states.

i. Principal Organs

The Treaty of Chaguaramas articulates the principal organs responsible for policy-making and implementation in CARICOM:

The Conference of Heads of Government: This constitutes the supreme decision-making organ of CARICOM. It consists of heads of governments of member states and is responsible for setting the overall policy direction of the Community. The Conference meets annually in the form of ordinary summits. It takes decisions by consensus since it is an intergovernmental organization (Payne & Sutton, 2007). One of the best examples of its influence is the Conference's combined diplomatic stance at the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement negotiations, when the CARICOM countries lobbied for the establishment of the 1.5°C goal to protect small island states from the adverse effects of climate change (Thomas, 2021).

The Community Council of Ministers: The Community Council is the second-highest-ranking decision-making organ and consists of ministers responsible for CARICOM affairs, typically foreign ministers. It manages the activities of other community organs and offers sectoral coordination.

ii. Supporting Councils

Several functional councils support the principal organs:

Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED): Makes policies about trade, industry, and regional economic development. COTED has significantly contributed to the management of trade disputes and ensuring national trade policies are aligned with the goals of the region.

Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR): Coordinates the members' foreign policy. A traditional example of COFCOR's activity was during CARICOM's member states' joint diplomatic effort to negotiate better conditions for Caribbean sugar exports during EU-ACP (African, Caribbean, Pacific) negotiations.

Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD): Overseeing education, health, labor, and youth affairs. CARICOM's successful coordination of the regional COVID-19 pandemic response, including the establishment of CARPHA (Caribbean Public Health Agency), was organized in part through COHSOD (Thomas, 2021).

iii. Specialized Institutions and Agencies

CARICOM has many specialized institutions set up to enable its functions in specific areas:

Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ): Instituted in 2001 as a final appeal court and interpreter of CARICOM law for the region. While not yet a final appellate court for all member states, it is highly significant in the adjudication of disputes under the CSME (Bishop, 2013).

Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC): Instituted in 1972, CXC accredits regional educational qualifications, like CSEC and CAPE examinations, ensuring levels of education are standardized across the region.

Caribbean Development Bank (CDB): Provides financing assistance for sustainable development initiatives, with emphasis on infrastructure and social development.

CARPHA (Caribbean Public Health Agency): Established in 2011 to merge the region's health agencies. CARPHA played a critical role in regional coordination action against the COVID-19 pandemic, such as surveillance, testing support, and public health measures.

iv. Implementation Mechanisms

Implementation of CARICOM decisions is facilitated by the CARICOM Secretariat based in Georgetown, Guyana. The Secretariat is responsible for administrative assistance, policy coordination, and member state compliance. Despite its central role, critics like Girvan (2012) have blamed the Secretariat for a lack of powers to enforce decision-making, arguing that CARICOM's consensus decision-making structure serves to hamper implementation.

The other institutional tool of central importance is the CSME, formally instituted in 2006. The CSME would create a single market among member states with the free movement of goods, services, capital, and professional labor. Its application has, however, been uneven. While Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago have embraced aspects of the CSME, others, such as the Bahamas, have refused to join in its entirety (Byron & Lewis, 2007).

v. Decision-Making Process

One of the distinguishing features of CARICOM's architecture is that it is intergovernmental. Compared to the supranational features of the European Union, CARICOM values sovereignty retention: decisions are made by consensus, not a majority vote. This maintains national autonomy at the expense of sometimes causing "implementation deficit disorder"—a recently coined term that Norman Girvan (2012) applied to describe the frequent gap between consent and action.

Illustrative Example: CARICOM and Regional Diplomacy

One of the most compelling examples of CARICOM institutional effectiveness is in regional foreign policy coordination, especially climate diplomacy. By means of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), CARICOM members spearheaded the campaign to attain the 1.5°C global warming goal at the 2015 UN Climate Conference (COP21). The united stance mattered because climate change is a matter of survival for low-lying Caribbean countries (Bishop, 2013).

Similarly, CARICOM's joint diplomatic effort in acquiring COVID-19 vaccines from the COVAX facility highlighted the pragmatic relevance of foreign policy coordination (Thomas, 2021). Without such regional unity, small states could have struggled to secure vital healthcare supplies in the midst of global competition.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is both a reflection of the hopes and challenges of post-colonial Caribbean regionalism. Out of the visions to promote economic, political, and social integration among small developing states, CARICOM's Treaty of Chaguaramas established an overall framework for regional cooperation. Its institutionalized organs, councils, specialized institutions, and decision-making organs have facilitated significant achievements in trade, diplomacy, education, and health.

Nonetheless, CARICOM's intergovernmental character has also been responsible for slow policy implementation and uneven access, highlighting the persistent tension between regional integration and national sovereignty. In the years to come, the surmounting of these structural limitations is required if CARICOM is to meaningfully realize the vision of its founding members and effectively respond to the imperatives of globalization, economic uncertainty, and climate change.

4. PROSPECTS OF CARICOM

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Caribbean's top regional integration organization, possesses both traditional existing problems and fresh opportunities for the 21st century. Its future hinges on the ability of its governments to work together to resolve shared issues and exploit their combined strengths. Being small island developing states (SIDS), CARICOM members are still confronted with external vulnerability, limited home markets, and residual effects of colonial economic formations. But opportunities exist in regionalism to transform these into pillars of collective strength, offering prospects for economic diversification, political influence, and security cooperation.

i. Economic Prospects: Building a Resilient Regional Economy

Among the strongest CARICOM possibilities is the potential to establish a dynamic regional economy through the successful implementation of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). Economic integration allows member nations to benefit from advantages that would not be possible for single nations, including access to the larger marketplace, greater opportunities for investment, and economies of scale. As Walker (2018) explains, "regional integration makes small economies able to benefit from scale economies, increased market access, and increased foreign investment opportunities" (Walker, 2018, p. 102).

By synchronizing trade legislation and reducing tariffs on intra-regional trade, CARICOM has made extensive advances in supporting the free movement of goods and services within the region. The free movement of professional labor, though unevenly applied, remains a key driver for regional productivity and innovation (Byron & Lewis, 2007). Professionals like teachers, healthcare professionals, and engineers have increasingly crisscrossed borders across the Caribbean, helping to offset shortages in labor and drive economic vibrancy.

Furthermore, CARICOM's commitment to a single external tariff (CET) strengthens the bloc in negotiating trade agreements with its foreign partners. A regional representation of the negotiations of trade provides stronger negotiating power for CARICOM members in negotiating with big economies like the European Union (EU), the United States, and China. For example, CARICOM's membership in the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU has opened new markets for Caribbean exports as well as provided development assistance (Hinds, 2008).

Despite these advantages, CARICOM's economic destiny depends on overcoming several long-standing challenges, including delayed implementation of CSME provisions, asymmetric membership by member states, and a rise in private sector participation. In order to achieve total economic realization, CARICOM will need to overcome these internal obstacles while continuing to forge external partnerships with world financial institutions and trade blocs.

ii. Political Prospects: Strengthening Regional Diplomacy and Cohesion

Aside from economics, CARICOM's political relevance also concerns us. The bloc has been successful in providing a shared diplomatic presence for its members, particularly in third-party constituencies such as the UN, OAS, and WTO. In defining positions on global matters, CARICOM enhances the global exposure and negotiating influence of small Caribbean states.

One of the most glaring indications of CARICOM's diplomatic excellence was its landmark role at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21), where the bloc, alongside other small island developing states as part of the umbrella of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), was successful in its efforts to have the 1.5°C target included in the final agreement (Thomas, 2021). The success reiterated the power of regional unity in having small nations' voices heard globally.

Furthermore, CARICOM is a favorable platform for regional political coordination and conflict management. The Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) has a central role in coordinating foreign policies and facilitating diplomatic discourse among the member governments. This framework is particularly important in a region with a history of disjoining colonial legacies and political fragmentation (Bishop & Payne, 2010). Through COFCOR, CARICOM helps to foster stability, reduce intra-regional tensions, and deepen a sense of regional identity.

Furthermore, CARICOM's efforts towards encouraging human rights, democratic government, and the rule of law within member states provide an essential vehicle for long-term political development. Democratic institution strengthening, election observation, and judicial cooperation have all contributed to building regional resilience and stability.

iii. Strategic Partnerships and External Support

CARICOM's ability to achieve its economic and political agendas is reinforced by its strategic partnerships with other powerful international institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and regional development agencies. These partnerships provide technical assistance, capital, and strategic counsel in such varied areas as infrastructure construction to fiscal policy restructuring.

For example, the World Bank's Caribbean Regional Communications Infrastructure Program (CARCIP) has focused on building digital infrastructure across the region, in recognition of the potential of digital transformation to drive sustainable economic growth (World Bank, 2022). Similarly, collaboration with the IMF has served member countries by enabling them to manage external debt and macroeconomic reform, and achieving increased economic resilience.

Further external engagement is exemplified by CARICOM with its interregional partnerships with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) Group, extending beyond its membership and exercising more influence in the wider Global South. Such partnerships allow CARICOM to gain benefits from South-South cooperation and increase its global bargaining power.

In conclusion, the CARICOM future spectrum is envisioned in terms of translating regional solidarity into tangible deliverables in the real world on economic, political, and security levels. Effectiveness of the CSME, the ability of diplomacy to be effective in international forums, and the measured leverage of international aid all create pointers towards viable directions for regional sustainable growth. Despite challenges, most prominently in implementation and cohesion, there is evident potential for CARICOM to be a force for Caribbean advancement. With politically unified will, institutional growth, and cooperation, CARICOM can continue to be an active instrument of prosperity and resilience for the Caribbean.

5. CHALLENGES FACING CARICOM

Despite the enormous potential and promise of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the regional integration body continues to face a raft of structural, economic, political, and institutional challenges that militate against its full realization. These challenges are deeply rooted in both domestic limitations and external geopolitical pressures, which collectively overcomplicate the process of regional integration and weaken the effectiveness of CARICOM programs.

i. Economic Disparities and Structural Imbalances

One of the greatest challenges to CARICOM is the vast economic disparity among its members. While some nations, such as Trinidad and Tobago, have relatively diversified economies with substantial oil and gas exports, others, such as Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, rely on a narrow range of agricultural or tourism-based exports. This economic variation presents a challenge to having uniform economic policies that can suit all members. As Davenport (2019) puts it, "the disparity in economic performance between CARICOM states complicates the process of policy harmonisation and reduces the effectiveness of collective economic strategies" (Davenport, 2019, p. 88).

Asymmetry in development levels has a tendency to result in uneven commitment to CARICOM goals, such as contributions to regional institutions and adherence to agreed economic arrangements such as the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). Large economies may not be willing to provide disproportionate economic contributions to regional activities from which they gain no direct benefit, while small economies may feel left out of key decision-making.

Furthermore, the majority of Caribbean economies are highly vulnerable to external shocks, including natural disasters, global commodity price instability, and pandemic-related disruption, as the world experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The varying capacities of member states to withstand and recover from such shocks also generate regional imbalances, creating ongoing stresses within CARICOM's integration process.

ii. External Geopolitical and Trade Pressures

In addition to intra-regional disparities, CARICOM is located in an increasingly complex and volatile global geopolitical environment. The Caribbean's dependence on foreign trade, aid, and investment renders the region acutely susceptible to the strategic interests of more influential global players. The removal of preferential trade agreements, such as the EU-ACP Sugar Protocol that had stood for decades, has forced most Caribbean economies to compete in global markets on less favorable terms (Payne & Sutton, 2013).

Barnes (2020) also highlights how "external pressures, such as preferential trade agreements with large economies, serve to distract and divert attention and resources away from regional integration efforts and undermine the collective bargaining power of CARICOM" (Barnes, 2020, p. 134). CARICOM members, for example, have at certain moments pursued bilateral trade agreements with influential states like the United States or China, undermining the region's collective bargaining power.

Additionally, the rise of competing regional blocs within the Latin American region, such as the Pacific Alliance and the new expanded role of MERCOSUR, has contributed to CARICOM's existential quandary in the broader hemispheric trade space. Without an activist and coordinated external trade policy, CARICOM risks being sidelined in international economic negotiations, further widening its structural vulnerabilities.

iii. Political Divergences and Fragmentation

Compounding the economic challenge are the deep-seated political differences that persist between member states of CARICOM. Despite shared colonial histories and cultural affinities, the region is characterized by diverse political systems, including constitutional monarchies, parliamentary democracies, and republican governments. These differing political institutions, along with divergent domestic agendas, often create disharmony in regional decision-making.

Divergences in resource allocation, foreign policy stances, and regional security strategies tend to serve as stumbling blocks to consensus-building. For example, divergent national positions on Venezuelan and Cuban relations have, at times, exposed underlying rifts in the community's foreign policy stance (Bishop & Payne, 2010).

Moreover, exogenous geopolitical shifts, such as U.S. foreign policy changes towards the region or China-Taiwan diplomatic competition in the Caribbean, further exacerbate internal tensions among CARICOM. Member states often pursue their diplomatic agendas in pursuit of national gain, sometimes at the expense of regional unity.

As Knight (2021) observes, "the plurality of political cultures within CARICOM tends to express itself in slow consensus-building, undermining rapid policy responses to emerging challenges" (Knight, 2021, p. 54). This slowness in decision-making was very evident in CARICOM's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when fragmented responses to travel bans and vaccine procurement revealed the limits of regional solidarity.

iv. Institutional Weaknesses and Capacity Deficits

Another central challenge lies in the institutional weaknesses and capacity limitations of both the central institutions of CARICOM and the national bureaucracies of the member states. The CARICOM Secretariat, the body charged with coordinating the region's integration agenda, is widely criticized as under-resourced and overworked. Low administrative capacity routinely maps onto implementation gaps between ambitious regional declarations and their realization in practice.

While CARICOM has put in place various legal and institutional arrangements, such as the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to adjudicate trade disputes, enforcement of regional judgments remains irregular. Most integration initiatives are plagued by what Girvan (2012) aptly describes as "implementation deficit disorder", a chronic problem whereby agreements are signed but not effectively implemented at the national level.

V. Dependence on External Assistance

Finally, CARICOM's dependence on external financial assistance introduces an additional complication. While global organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank play major roles in financing regional programs, their policy conditionalities occasionally clash with regional developmental priorities. Lipschutz (2017) cautions that "external aid, while useful, sometimes leads to policy prescriptions ill-adapted to local conditions, thus limiting the autonomy of regional organizations such as CARICOM" (Lipschutz, 2017, p. 41).

For instance, structural adjustment programs pushed on Caribbean economies by international lenders in the 1980s and 1990s had mixed outcomes, tending to prioritize macroeconomic stabilization over social development, which in some cases heightened poverty and inequality. Thus, while external partners remain significant, CARICOM must walk a fine line between optimizing the utilization of external support and safeguarding regional autonomy and self-determination.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While CARICOM has tremendous potential for driving regional integration and development, it is also confronted with a host of economic, political, institutional, and geopolitical pressures.

To meet the overarching challenges of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), there must be a specific and realistic response, founded on institution strengthening, greater economic integration, political cohesion, and effective international action.

To begin with, CARICOM must place institutional reform at the core agenda to close the gap between policy-making and implementation. The CARICOM Secretariat needs more human and financial resources, supported by firm commitments from the member states. Establishing mechanisms for compliance will ensure member states' respect for regional decisions, primarily on trade and governance.

Second, accelerated overall establishment of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) is vital to correct economic imbalances. This entails dismantling barriers to intra-regional commerce, improving transport and logistics, and investing in joint regional undertakings in activities such as renewable energy, technology, and agro-industry. Special attention should be devoted to supporting smaller economies through specially designed programs that will facilitate their integration more effectively.

Political cohesion is also necessary. CARICOM must have internalized systems of consultation in order to arrive at a consensus on key regional policies. The Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) must also more energetically deal with external relations in order to ensure that the member states are collectively represented at the international level, particularly on climate change and trade matters.

In addition, CARICOM must strengthen its international partnerships without losing regional sovereignty. Greater integration with international organizations such as the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) can bring about greater trade and diversification of politics. Lastly, member nations must insist on preferential treatment of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) during international finance negotiations, considering their vulnerability to climate disasters.

Finally, climate resilience must be on top of CARICOM's agenda. Establishing regional institutions like the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and making it easier to access climate finance will protect the social and economic fabric of the region from environmental risks.

In conclusion, increased unity, institutional capacity, economic cooperation, and strategic diplomacy are the sine qua non of translating CARICOM's adversity to advantage for sustainable regional development.

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