

# The Future Centre Trust: Towards a Model of Sustainable Development

## BARBADOS

### Introduction

The Future Centre Trust (FCT) represents a comprehensive effort towards promoting sustainable development on the island of Barbados. Priority actions identified under the SIDS POA, can be interpreted as being discrete areas of activity towards sustainable development. However, the FCT made a conscious effort towards integrating all areas of its work including the advocacy of sustainable agriculture, environmental protection, provision and dissemination of environmental information, promotion of organic food, support for organic farming, and the encouragement of alternative medicine through the use of herbs.

The mission of the FCT was shaped by the emerging social and environmental issues facing Barbados in the early 1990s. In 1961, the United Nations identified Barbados as a model of good environmental management. Today, the country scores high on the Human

Development Index and has a relatively high GDP per capita, but this has been achieved at high costs in other developmental spheres. The social cost associated with the production of these "favourable" indices is not necessarily reflected in the price of goods and services produced. The GDP figures at best, mask the total economic and environmental cost of producing that level of effort. Waste generation is an obvious example, it has been estimated that in Barbados 70% of the waste matter generated can be composted and another 25% can be recycled, but this does not take place. Instead disposal through landfills have been the norm. Sewage and effluent flowing to the south and west coasts have contributed to the degradation of nearly 75% of the coral reef on those coasts. Coral reefs and beaches are important elements of the country's natural resources in terms of maintaining its attractiveness as a tourist destination. Today most fresh water springs in Barbados are threatened by garbage, faecal matter and in particular, agricultural contaminants

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leaching into the underground aquifers. A higher level of environmental awareness and incentives are needed to stimulate and effect the required behavioural changes to combat these negative developments.

It is against this background that the emergence of an organization aimed at promoting sustainable development the Future Centre Trust - is so relevant, especially in terms of the country's development. Despite its other efforts, perhaps at this time, the greatest contribution of the FCT is its assistance to the development and implementation of public awareness and education programmes, which are designed to gain local recognition of the need to control waste at its source, and to convert it appropriately.

### **Background**

In April/May 1994 Barbados played host to the United Nations Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. A significant feature of the Conference was the Village of Hope Exhibition, in which practical demonstrations of twenty-eight aspects of sustainable development were made available to conference delegates and other visitors. It is noteworthy, that the exhibition was able to involve the participation of more than three thousand volunteers with the inclusion of a number of overseas

contingents to create the displays and exhibits. Over forty-five thousand persons visited the booths and because of the great interest and success of the Village of Hope, the FCT became the successor to that exhibition.

### *Background to the Formation of the FCT*

The FCT has had a favourable beginning in terms of sustainability. An action committee produced the "Initiatives of Hope" which took place at a meeting under the distinguished patronage of the then Governor General, Dame Nita Barrow at Government House, the official residence of the Governor General. From these initiatives grew the Future Centre Trust, with the Future Centre as a permanent interpretive centre. In February 1996, the Future Centre Trust became formally incorporated both as a trust and as a non-profit company and became the permanent successor to the Village of Hope - the parallel activity to the United Nations SIDS Global Conference on sustainable development.

The FCT is located at Edghill, in the parish of St. Thomas, towards the centre of the island, five miles from the capital and city of Bridgetown. It is run by a facilitator, and a six-member Board of Trustees. The administrative aspects of the Trust's work have now been augmented with the appointment of a manager.

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The Trust's work has been supported by various groups and companies on the island. The Trust obtains funding for its day-to-day activities primarily from member contributions and donations from friends of the organization. They are variously referred to as Angels (those donating US\$1,500.00) and Cherubs (those contributing US\$500.00). By June 1996, the FCT reportedly had received financial support to the equivalent of US\$125,000.00 in cash or kind. As is the case of most not-for-profit organizations, the Trust faces uncertainty regarding its budget from time to time, as some donors cease their annual contributions.

#### *The Contribution of the FCT*

The work of the FCT is governed by its mission statement:

*To create a permanent stimulus to enhance the quality of life in Barbados as a role model in the search for sustainable economies.*

The Trust in keeping with the spirit and intent of the SIDS Programme of Action, has been active in:

- Increasing public awareness of its aims.
- Networking with similar organizations around the world.

- Creating a newsletter, posters, and high quality promotional material on sustainable development issues.
- Launching many children's activities and educational programmes.
- Encouraging visits by school groups.

Since June 1998, the establishment of a permanent interpretive exhibition centre to highlight issues of sustainable development has been the focal point of the FCT.

Fully developed, the FCT's permanent interpretive centre is envisioned as a place where people can encounter working models of a sustainable future from all over the world. At the centre, visitors are able to view exhibits displaying some of the possible consequences to human development and the environment, should present environmental trends remain unchecked. The exhibits however, are not all negative and also include cogent local and overseas examples of arrests and reversals of negative environmental trends.

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## Objectives of the FCT

### *Overall Objectives*

The overriding objective of the FCT is to create an exhibition about sustainable development as a focal point of the work of the Future Centre Trust to:

- Stimulate interest and enthusiasm among Barbadians about environmental matters and sustainable development in a small island state, and to explain how each individual can make a difference in helping to realize the Trust's aims.
- Create a focal point for the education of Barbadian school children on local and global environmental issues.
- Create a centre that will also appeal to tourists as a stimulating, enjoyable and fun attraction with an educational element on environmental issues that will be just as relevant to them as to Barbadians.
- Act as a focal point for the launch of outreach programmes to further increase awareness among Barbadians on the need for increased public involvement in sustainable development issues and finding appropriate solutions to them.

### *Commercial Objectives*

Economic sustainability is essential for the work of the FCT. Thus, some of the activities of the centre must be income generating. As a non-profit organization, the commercial objectives of the centre reflect an interest in national welfare rather than in material gain. The facility can not remain viable based on membership fees **and** donations alone. Among the commercial objectives of the FCT are:

- Funding the capital set-up costs of the centre achieved without the burdensome loan repayment costs through a combination of exhibit sponsorships, donations (cash, materials and work time) and grant aid.
- Funding the on-going operations of the centre through a combination of admission charges, income from on-site facilities (such as a restaurant-type facility where its organically grown food can be obtained), visitor donations and rental charges or other lessees, for the use of office and workshop facilities on the site
- Generating an annual income that not only fully covers the costs of the operations, but also provides a surplus to fund an outreach programme. This will

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consist of a mobile exhibition with media coverage that will greatly expand the awareness of the Trust's work and aims among the Barbadian people.

### **Achievements of the Future Centre Trust**

#### *Activities*

The FCT has enlisted the support and participation of individuals, communities, schools, churches, businesses, clubs, and government agencies (for example, Ministries of Health, Environment, Education, Tourism and Foreign Affairs) in its work. However, most of the efforts of the FCT have manifested themselves in its outreach programme. Among the tasks the Trust has engaged in the last four years include: the production of weekly newspaper pages, and the promotion of environmental awareness and nature hikes in collaboration with the Barbados National Trust. Some activities serve to identify areas of environmental abuse in the country, including, those involving the illiat dumping of garbage and refuse in the various gullies. Additionally, the FCT engages in school activities, radio spots and in the practice and promotion of organic farming.

The FCT has participated in seminars and fora locally and abroad championing the centre's causes and other issues surrounding sustainable deve-

lopment. Recommencement of circulation of its newsletter, which became suspended in 1997 has been an important milestone. On average once every two weeks, a school visits the centre and it appears that the environmental protection message is getting through especially to the younger generation. Students have given up on occasion, their holidays to work with the Trust on a voluntary basis.

#### *Information Dissemination*

The FCT has successfully produced leaflets, posters, stickers, advertisements, and radio and TV spots the combination of which is regarded as a repository of information on environmental matters on Barbados. Environmental notice boards have been placed in many primary schools and the FCT has been instrumental in providing recognition of achievements by groups on efforts related to the environment. "Well Done" congratulatory certificates have also been distributed by the organization to deserving individuals. The FCT in recognising the importance of highlighting those who have pursued the "Initiatives of Hope" and who have taken steps to promote sustainable development, has awarded persons the FCT's Certificates of Initiatives awards.

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### *National and International Recognition of its Work*

The FCT's Sunday hiking activity in collaboration with the Barbados National Trust has generated interest in areas of environmental damage in Barbados including a focus on the beaches and gullies. It is estimated that this activity has had the ripple effect of introducing ten additional persons to its message and concerns, for every one person participating in any one of those hikes. The word of mouth medium of dissemination has been effective.

The Trust has also been receiving increasing recognition by organisations abroad for its work. In 1996, the FCT was the recipient of the Future Social Innovations Award for the planned Future Centre, by the British Institute for Social Inventions.

The FCT has generated interest in the younger generation of Barbados, to the extent that students of the hospitality section of the Barbados Community College have been instrumental in getting their school to arrange for visits to the site. The fact that the adolescent population is aware of the work of the Trust speaks well for the effectiveness of the communication process.

### *Recycled Tyres and Alternative Medicine*

The demonstration effect of the Trust's tyre garden is noteworthy. As part of its

exhibition, the FCT has been promoting the recycling of tyres for use in the cultivation of food. It boasts of having the largest garden of this type in the world. The impact of this demonstration can be seen in the creative reuse of tyres on the island for the growing of many types of plants, besides food. Tyres have been converted into interestingly designed flowerpots which now adorn the surroundings of many households in Barbados.

Recycled tyres are also used in the cultivation of herbal and medicinal plants. Not only are visitors to the centre instructed on the use of the plants, but also in many cases, the visitor is exposed for the first time, to some rare species of medicinal herbs on the island. The FCT's contribution to alternative medicine is therefore expanding.

### *Organic Food Promotion*

The FCT has been championing the use of organic food by the local population. At least one supermarket, J B's Supermarket has adopted the organic food concept. Organically grown food is sold at the Centre and it remains an important clearing-house for such products grown in the area. The promotion of this type of food is expected to remain an integral part of the work of the Trust through its restaurant-type facility located at the Centre.

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## The Challenges and Constraints

### *Financing the Programme*

The major constraint facing the organization relates to the funding of its programme and the filling of the associated human resource gaps. These impediments frustrate the completion of the centrepiece of its cash-generation and income earning capacity, the Future Centre.

### *Reliance on Volunteers*

- The Trust suffers from the chronic problem associated with similar organizations - reliance on volunteers - which is seriously affecting the organization's effectiveness.
- The focus on the dissemination of environmentally friendly ideas has worked and is paying dividends.
- Although help is being given by various firms on the island regarding building material for renovations, there remains an enormous gap in terms of upgrading the Centre in time for the next winter tourist season. The hope is to have the site established as a truly visitor friendly stop-over for local tourists.

## Impact of the Future Centre Trust

### *A Change in Attitude and Awareness*

The FCT has had some impact on the overall population's attitude to recycling (except perhaps on the efforts of supermarkets) and on environmental issues in general. Unfortunately, there has not been a translation of this level of awareness into more community participation in the work of the Centre although some positive signs have begun to emerge. It is hoped that a greater number of donors will come forward. However, individual support through memberships appears to be growing.

Perhaps the greatest impact on changing attitudes from the work of the FCT, have come in the form of consultations by various bodies regarding environmental issues and concerns facing the country. Today the FCT sits on every formal environmentally related committee on the island.

### *Greater Local Business and Community Support*

Although individual participation, for on-site improvements through a more vibrant volunteer corps, has been great, the Trust has been able to attract meaningful business community participation in its fund-raising and promotion activities.

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Perhaps the greatest domestic impact of such co-operative effort has been the distribution of bookmarks to visitors to the island. These bookmarks highlight aspects of environmental protection while simultaneously serving as an advertisement for each sponsor. Two hundred thousand visitors have been sensitised using this approach which has generated interest among the more environmentally conscious visitor on local efforts and sensitive sites. It also promotes desirable standards of behavior regarding the island's ecosystem. Sponsorship of other aspects of the Trust's work has been an interesting offshoot of this campaign.

Information on the work of the FCT appeared in the 1996-97 national telephone directory within an additional page of information published, courtesy the telephone service provider. The message on sustainability is being supported significantly by at least two other local companies suggesting a certain degree of external alignment with the work of the Trust.

#### *Getting Celebrities on Board*

The work of the FCT has also attracted the attention of some local celebrities as well as expatriates. Many local musicians and artistes have given free performances or offered their work for use by the FCT. Among the expatriate celebrities for example, is Germany's leading environmental cartoonist, Horst

Heitzinger, who has made his cartoons available for use by the FCT in Barbados and within the Caribbean, in admiration and support of the work of the Trust. These cartoons have been appearing in the FCT's newsletters.

#### *The FCT's Influence Beyond the Shores of Barbados*

The work of the FCT has generated interest across national boundaries. It has also taken initiatives to reach out to a group of environmentally concerned persons in the nearby country of Dominica. This group called on the FCT for assistance in 1997 regarding the establishment of a "Village of Hope" in Dominica, similar to the one in Barbados. Interested persons from Dominica have also paid several visits to the Edghill site to learn more about the establishment of a similar site in Dominica. The FCT also assisted the 1997 Forum on Sustainable Tourism in Dominica. Such exchanges represent technical co-operation among developing countries (TCDC) in action.

#### **Summary**

With determination and foresight, FCT has begun to make an impact on awareness of issues of sustainability on a small island developing state. One disappointing aspect of its programme has been setbacks related to the unsuccessful completion of renovations

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to the main building housing the Future Centre. However, this has not daunted the spirit and mission of the Trust.

In the short-term, the promotional efforts are having the desired impact. The financial constraints suggest the need for purposeful and incremental steps towards the completion of the exhibition centre and also point to the short to medium-term development of an interim working area, as a launching pad for fuller development in the longer term.

### **Lessons Learned**

#### *Applications and Implications*

- The experience of the Future Centre Trust within its sustainable development has provided some interesting lessons on institutional sustainability issues and its use as a possible template for similar initiatives elsewhere.
- The exercise has demonstrated that the role and involvement of the commercial sector is critical in a project of this nature and scale. Locally, at least one supermarket has been promoting organic food, an integral part of the work of the Trust. The co-operation from the private sector regarding the dissemination of bookmarks has been an encouraging development.
- Addressing waste management with creativity can yield dividends for those involved and for the country. Promoting the recycling of tyres for use in the cultivation of food, demonstrates what can be done with potentially serious environmental health hazards - used tyres. The **FCT** has shown that tyres can be transformed into useful decorative plant pots and/or herbal gardens, providing income, improving aesthetics and protecting the environment.
- The work of the FCT underscores the importance of sponsorship and positive publicity in promoting environmental awareness. The effort has shown that a successful thrust in one area can generate assistance in an entirely different area, providing options especially for those organisations wishing to join an on-going positive activity.
- The case has also demonstrated that environmental promotion efforts also need wider community support. The espousal of the cause of waste reduction and environmental pollution by the wider Barbadian community is growing and significantly, there is an encouraging "buy-in" by the younger generation.
- Organizations such as the FCT need validation of their existence and

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activities. Perhaps, the greatest recognition and learning from the work of the FCT may have come from the consultative relationship

between various bodies and the FCT regarding environmental issues and hazards facing the country.

**Recommendations**

Survival of the Future Centre Trust for five years, at a time in the region when donor support has been reduced to an all time low, provides an important lesson in understanding institutional sustainability issues of struggling, not-for-profit development organisations.

It is recommended that a more in-depth analysis of the mission, work and future direction of the Trust be undertaken by interested international development agencies, with a view towards identification and articulation of specific policy instruments and donor support mechanisms required for sustaining the noble efforts of such institutions.