

Neighbours to the North: Part II

By **Catherine Morris** - June 30, 2019

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This is the second part of STAR Businessweek's Canada-Caribbean series.

Canada and the Caribbean may enjoy a strong relationship – economically, politically and culturally – but it is clearly not a partnership of equals. As the wealthier, more populous and more developed partner, the northern powerhouse is lending finance, expertise and support to a range of initiatives throughout the Caribbean region.

Between 2006 and 2016, Canada invested just over CAD\$ 6bn in development assistance throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, according to Statistics Canada. This funding covered a wide range of sectors including education, employment poverty eradication, gender equality, sustainable development and technical support.

A group of Saint Lucians at Hewanorra International Airport before departing for British Columbia as participants in the Temporary Foreign Workers Programme.

The Compete Caribbean Partnership Facility (CCPF), better known as Compete Caribbean, is directly supported and funded in part by the government of Canada. The private sector development group works in 13 countries in the region to offer technical training, foster innovative new business ideas and help companies overcome common challenges. Canada is just one of a number of international donors involved in Compete, joining up with the Inter-American Development Bank and the UK Department for International Development to

support projects that enhance productivity and competitiveness in the Caribbean private sector.

"Canada contributes with substantial financial resources to the objectives of the facility," says Compete Caribbean's Executive Director Dr Sylvia Dohnert who goes on to explain that it is very much a mutually beneficial partnership. "The CCPF allows Canada to have an impact on private sector development. Historically, Canada has had strong ties to the Caribbean. Canada is very active in international aid and seeks to finance projects that have a proven developmental impact. For Compete, Canada's contribution allows it to implement a larger number of projects in the Caribbean region."

Projects supported by Compete span a variety of industries, including agriculture. The latter is of particular interest to Canada, which contributes to regional agriculture in a variety of ways – mindful of the fact that Caribbean farmers are also exporters to northern markets with a high demand for tropical produce.

According to the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), 3,623 OECS nationals worked in Canada's agricultural sector between 2014 and 2018, under the Canadian Temporary Foreign Workers Programme (TFWP) based in Toronto. And the figures continue to be healthy this year with 826 workers already recruited in the first quarter of 2019. These workers not only increase their earnings by taking job opportunities in Canada, they also broaden their skills, experiences and know-how.

Speaking of the success of the initiative, Saint Lucia's Minister of Labour Stephenson King said: "Most of the farmers have been able to educate their children, provide healthcare to their families and strengthen their whole economic base. In addition, a number of farmers have been able to get into their own farm production on their return to Saint Lucia which results in another form of income taking place in Saint Lucia."

Partnering for the future

One of the common criticisms levelled at development assistance is that this type of funding is a hand-out, rather than a hand-up. Dr Dohnert rejects this, saying: "In the case of Compete Caribbean, given that the resources are being used to build capacities that stimulate economic diversification and the competitiveness of the Caribbean region, development assistance is certainly a hand-up."

There are many areas in which the Caribbean can learn from Canada's expertise and experience to develop its own sustainable and independent industries. Canada is particularly keen to assist the region with its energy woes. Given that the Caribbean has some of the highest energy rates in the world, and is trailing behind in green energy generation, the region can learn a lot from its more environmentally-focused northern neighbour.

Developing opportunities in 'clean tech' is one of the Canadian High Commission in Barbados' four priority areas, alongside agriculture, education and infrastructure. Senior Trade Commissioner to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean at the High Commission, Georges Lemieux says the Commission is paying special attention to the latter in Saint Lucia

as the island moves to revamp and upgrade its transportation networks. "We keep a keen eye on that to make sure we connect Canadian companies with opportunities in infrastructure projects."

In terms of clean tech, Lemieux wants to see Canadians make the transition from supplying expertise, to making projects happen. He says: "Clean tech is so relevant to the region. We have the expertise and the interest. Now we want to move to a different level where we have Canadian companies implementing all the good ideas that are out there."

And it's already happening – whether geothermal generation, solar power or clean technologies, Canada has a number of important projects in the pipeline throughout the region. Canadian group Potentia Renewables is currently working on construction of a 25MW solar power project in the Dominican Republic. An 'Innovation Lab' in Jamaica, managed by the Canadian-funded Caribbean Climate Innovation Centre, is assisting climate-focused start-ups develop the green technologies of the future, and the Caribbean Development Bank, supported by the CAD\$ 5mn Canadian Support to the Energy Sector in the Caribbean Fund, is upgrading and enhancing grid modernisation and energy storage in member countries.

Canada may be looking for good investments in the region, but it's also invested socially. According to Dr Dohnert, gender equality is high on its agenda and built into many of its development assistance initiatives. She says: "Canada stimulates projects that are gender-focused. It has a strong focus on gender and therefore ensures that partners such as Compete develop projects that have a development impact on women, girls and vulnerable groups."

CCPF has funded and enabled significant research into the challenges faced by women-owned firms in the region, as well as directly supporting such businesses through grants. Last month, the agency joined with the Canadian High Commission in Barbados to host Women Share, a conference featuring female entrepreneurs and business leaders.

Giving young women and girls empowering and inspirational examples aligns with another of Canada's major priorities in the region – education. Lemieux says the Commission is working to increase educational opportunities in Canada for Caribbean students, partnering with Canadian colleges to tour destinations in the region and present their courses and scholarships to young people. "Canada is a very good option for students to go and study," he says. "We go to Saint Lucia every year with universities to show students what's available."

Global Affairs Canada announced in January that its 2019-2020 Student Exchange Program for Latin American and Caribbean citizens would offer 650 short-term exchange scholarships to promote partnerships between educational institutions in Canada and the Latam region. These will build on the longstanding relationship between Caribbean students and learning centres in Canada, especially those in Atlantic Canada which, over the years, have welcomed thousands of Caribbean young people to colleges in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Islands. Links such as these ensure that the Caribbean-Canadian relationship will continue and deepen as it passes over to the next generation of citizenry.