

## ...and a Time for Culture

The link between cultural industries and international trade is a topic which is currently subject to significant international debate. While some countries treat cultural goods and services as commodities that can be traded, others view the sector as being so socially integrated that it should not be subject to international trade rules. Barbados' position on whether cultural services should be a part of its trade negotiations and other investment regimes remains somewhat ambiguous, especially since trade in goods inadvertently includes those of a cultural nature. Debate also centres on the extent to which we should seek to attract investment for cultural products versus the caution which should be displayed in this area. This article will highlight some of issues faced in trying to best position ourselves in the current economic environment.

To date, there is no international agreement on the term "cultural industries" and as such it is open to various interpretations and includes several areas of activity. According to UNESCO, cultural goods generally refer to those consumer goods that convey ideas, symbols and way of life. Cultural services on the other hand, are those activities aimed at satisfying cultural interests or needs. They typically consist of measures and supporting facilities for cultural practices that Government and private institutions make available to the community.

As noted earlier Barbados' policy on trade in cultural goods and services remains unclear. However, Barbados has already committed theatrical, production, singer group, band and orchestra to the WTO liberalisation process. Under the CSME, by removing all restrictions to goods and services, Barbados has taken an open approach to trade in cultural products. Since 1973, all goods including cultural goods have been moving freely throughout CARICOM. Non-wage earning service providers should now also be afforded freedom of movement throughout the Region. The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, which governs the CSME, states that there should be an accreditation mechanism in place to facilitate the movement of artistes, university graduates and musicians. How this will be facilitated however, is still subject to debate since these persons have already been moving for decades and their profession does not necessarily require formal education.

The Barbados Government has recognised that there are significant economic gains to be made from cultural industries. Other countries like the USA, Canada, the EC, Japan and China have long reaped the rewards of such ventures, boasting annual receipts which easily eclipse the hundred billion dollar mark. The potential revenue gains from this industry could be a key to long-term local and regional economic viability in a time when both sugar and banana based economies are experiencing difficulties. In order to take full advantage of its cultural industries Barbados should strengthen its enabling policies that encourage production and commercialisation as well as adopt appropriate regulations affecting record keeping, intellectual property and consumer rights.

We recognise that high production costs make it difficult for most Barbadian products to compete on price; we should therefore be seeking to exploit the cultural aspects of what we produce by adding value to established products and services. There are West Indian communities all over the world and particularly in Europe. Creative methods should be employed in strengthening our trade position in these markets by linking our cultural goods and services with other goods and services in order to establish niche markets and establish local brands.

As Government seeks to position Barbados and the wider region to take advantage of the markets available for both local and Caribbean cultural goods and services, the Barbados private sector should keep abreast of any developments and strategise to capitalise on the resultant opportunities.