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The Caribbean Cultural Industry Depends for its Success on the International Market

It remains true that the prosperity of every Caribbean country depends mainly on the growth of internationally competitive tourism, exports and other sources of foreign exchange. However, the cultural industry has become a small but significant supplement to the main foreign exchange earners in several countries.

In their efforts to stimulate the expansion of cultural activities, Caribbean policy makers should understand that the activities which are able to attract an overseas audience are the only ones that will flourish. Caribbean music, literature and festival arts have grown to importance because they are internationally competitive, and their practitioners sell their products and services in North America, Europe and around the world.

Thanks to modern communications, cultural products are tradable, and Caribbean individuals and companies who make their living in the cultural industry sell their products and services in overseas markets. The contribution that the home market makes to their earnings is too small to make a difference to their success.

The overwhelming importance of the overseas market is evident in each of the Caribbean's most successful cultural activities. Music is no doubt the largest Caribbean export, and its main markets are in

North America and Europe, with a significant presence and revenue earning capacity around the world, through tours, internet sales and intellectual property revenues. The Caribbean carnivals also earn most of their revenue from outside the Caribbean, through visitors to the events in the Caribbean, and the expertise and organisational skills which Caribbean practitioners provide to carnivals overseas. Literature is a third area where the Caribbean is internationally competitive in culture. Here again, the most well established practitioners publish abroad, and a majority of those who make a living from their craft also live overseas.

The logic of the cultural industry is the same as for tourism or any other Caribbean export: success depends on international competitiveness. Cultural activities will grow and flourish to the extent that they attract an international audience. The local market is too small to support anything larger than a cottage industry, and even that requires foreign currency from somewhere to buy equipment and supplies, as well as the daily consumption needs of the practitioners.

It is a characteristic of all small modern economies that their growth and development depends on their capacity to earn foreign exchange. The international success of Caribbean music, literature and festival arts is one more example of this reality.