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Caribbean Argonauts: Advancing Economic Modernization

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## 1. Introduction

Since the original integration studies by Thomas and Brewster in 1967 (Thomas and Brewster, 1967), very few analysts have concluded that the countries of the region would do better by themselves than in concert.<sup>1</sup> There is a widely-shared consensus that economic integration is necessary if the region is to prosper in an age of economic globalization. As a result, much Caribbean history since the break-up of the West Indies Federation in 1962 can be understood as an effort to respect national sovereignty on one hand while on the other hand achieving the degree of integration necessary to achieve a high level of economic development. To date however the leaders of the region have failed to implement an arrangement that achieves a satisfactory trade-off between the two. The extent of the regional integration that has been achieved has not been sufficient to accelerate the region's economic modernization. Economic growth in CARICOM, though substantial over the years, has not been at the level of other comparable countries.

In order to identify a strategy by which the region can escape the cul-de-sac in which it finds itself, I first review how the region initially hoped to interface with the global economy and the changes that it was required to

adopt in the recent years of market liberalization. Second, I explore the only limited extent to which the Caribbean has been able to take advantage of the opportunities that modern technology has created in recent years for poor countries. In the third section I argue that the very heavy emigration that the region has experienced, in particular the massive outflow of highly educated people, has been an important obstacle to both integration and development. Finally, I suggest that an effort to attract highly skilled, entrepreneurial émigrés back to the region could allow CARICOM to become a more successful participant in the global economy.

## 2. Integration and Development

The assumptions that lay behind the 1973 Treaty of Chaguaramus creating CARICOM were that the region's agricultural exports, in particular sugar and bananas, would continue to receive tariff-protected access to European markets, while free trade within the region and the imposition of a common external tariff would trigger a process of import substitution industrialization. While bananas and sugar, as well as tourism, would continue to earn foreign exchange, a regional protected market would allow producers to expand production beyond the confines of their individual home countries. In this way local firms

would be able to scale up production and achieve internationally competitive cost structures.

Neither dimension of this strategy - preferential access to markets abroad and protection in regional common market - proved viable. In the first place, economic integration was not implemented as it had been designed. As late as 2009 a World Bank study declared both that "economic integration has stalled in the region" and that more than thirty years after the 1973 Treaty of Chaguaramas "called for the establishment of a common market...that goal is still rather far from being met..." (World Bank 2009, 31, xxxviii).

That the CARICOM process was incomplete meant in the first place that integration itself had little impact on the growth trajectory of the region. When Trinidad and Tobago's petroleum exports are excluded, intra-regional trade as a share of CARICOM's total international trade did not increase at all between 1979 and 2003, standing at about 6 percent of total trade throughout the period. Similarly the sectors that experienced the most substantial growth in these years - tourism and natural gas and petroleum - were largely unaffected by the tariff reductions implemented in these years. Moreira and Mendoza conclude that "more than three decades of regional

integration have not done much to change a regional division of labor that dates back from colonial times" (Moreira and Mendoza 2007, 22, 25).

In the second place the region's protected access to Europe's markets was inconsistent with the tide of trade liberalization that was underway in the international market. In 1993 the World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled that the European Community's banana market system was discriminatory, resulting in a protracted series of negotiations that largely stripped the region's industry of its tariff protection (Mandle 2000, 1-26). Sugar too lost most of its privileged access to this market when in 2001 the European Community opened its market to the world's poorest 48 nations under its Everything But Arms initiative (Ahmed 2001).

Under external pressure, CARICOM attempted to accommodate the neo-liberal paradigm. In 2002 it agreed to a Revised Treaty of Chaguaramus which committed the region to a reduction in its Common External Tariff thereby making it easier for overseas exporters to penetrate the regional market. This process of trade liberalization was further advanced in 2008 with the Economic Partnership Agreement between the countries of the region and the European Community. As Vaughan A. Lewis writes, "the assumption

about economic growth and industrialization underpinning the creation of the Caribbean Common Market in 1973...were now foreclosed. In the new environment of liberal trade, "integration into the international economy and a search for competitiveness within it was the new mantra (Lewis 2008, 4)

### 3. Technological Competence and Growth

Success in the global economy requires that the people and businesses in a country learn how to use advanced technology in production and shift the composition of their output to technologically sophisticated products. Doing both allows a country to earn higher levels of income thereby resulting in a rise in Gross Domestic Product per capita, the hallmark of the process of economic development. Such advances however are not easily accomplished. They require that firms have access to and are able efficiently to use advanced methods of products and the ability to produce sophisticated outputs.

The problem for the Caribbean is that the region ranks poorly in technological sophistication. Evidence of its shortfall is provided by the *Global Competitiveness Report* issued annually by the World Economic Forum (WEF). This is a survey of business people in 133 countries who are asked to assess their country on 110 specific variables affecting

Table 1  
Ranking of Caribbean Nations on Measures of Technological  
Competence

	Barbados	Guyana	Jamaica	Trinidad and Tobago
Firm-Level Technology Absorption	41	114	69	78
FDI and Technology Transfer	42	110	74	34
Capacity for Innovation	77	99	103	131
Company Spending on R&D	67	86	77	98
Availability of Scientists and Engineers	63	130	117	45

Source: World Economic Forum, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2009-10* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2009)

their economy's ability to compete in global markets. Four nations - Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, containing slightly less than 80 percent of the CARICOM population - are covered in these surveys. Table 1 reports on the ranking of the Caribbean nations to five responses reported in the survey under the headings "Technological Readiness" and "Innovation."

The responses that are recorded there underline the fact that the CARICOM countries seriously lag



in technological competence. On 15 of the 20 rankings that are reported in this table concerning "Firm Level Technology Absorption," "FDI and Technology Transfer," "Capacity for Innovation," "Company Spending on R&D," and "Availability of Scientists and Engineers" the nations of the region rank quite low - in the bottom half of the 133 countries. Guyana's and Jamaica's rankings are particularly low on all of these measures and even Trinidad and Tobago is in the bottom half on three of the five. Only Barbados has more rankings in the top half of the nations reporting than in the bottom half, though even for that country its firms are ranked in the lower half for their "capacity for innovation" and "company spending on R&D."

This assessment of the low technological level of the region is corroborated by data compiled by the World Bank on what it describes as "high tech exports," products such as pharmaceuticals, scientific instruments and electrical machinery (Table 2). These are exports that possess substantial research and development intensity and which typically therefore earn high unit prices. When a country produces such outputs it is described as having moved up the value chain and doing so is considered to be evidence of success in economic modernization.

Table 2

High Tech Exports per capita for Caribbean and Countries by their Level of Economic Development (\$US)

Caribbean <sup>1</sup>	15.6
Lower Middle Income Countries	91.8
Upper Middle Income Countries	131.5
High Income Countries	1,229.0

<sup>1</sup> Population-Weighted Mean for twelve Caribbean Countries.

Source: Computed from World Bank Data Base,  
<http://www.data.worldbank.org>

The countries of the West Indies are ranked among the lower middle and upper middle income countries by their per capita GDP. But as is clear from the table, the region's output of technologically sophisticated products rests at a very low level when compared to nations at comparable income levels. High tech per capita exports from the Caribbean are less than one-fifth that of the lower middle income countries and only a little more than one-tenth that of the upper middle income countries.

This assessment of the low technological level present in the Caribbean is consistent with the observation, recorded in Table 3, that the West Indies in recent years has not matched the growth occurring in other regions at comparable levels of development. The range in growth rates in CARICOM was quite wide, with Jamaica and Barbados

Table 3  
Growth Rates of Real Gross Domestic Product, CARICOM, 1990-  
2008, Other Regions, 1990-2007

Country	Growth Rate
Antigua/Barbuda	4.2
Barbados	1.4
Belize	6.7
Dominica	2.0
Grenada	3.3
Guyana	2.6
Jamaica	1.8
St.Kitts/Nevis	4.7
St.Lucia	3.9
St. Vincent/Grenadines	3.9
Suriname	2.8
Trinidad/Tobago	5.0
Population Weighted Mean	3.0
East Asia and Pacific	8.7
Latin America and Caribbean	3.4
Middle East and North Africa	4.1
South Asia	6.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.6

Source: CARICOM Countries: Computed from The World Bank, WDI Online, <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org>; Regions: Computed from The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2009*, Table 4.1.

growing at less than 2 percent per year, while Trinidad and Tobago's GDP grew at more than twice that level, 5.0 percent, and Belize grew even more rapidly, 6.7 percent, with the other nations grouped roughly in the 3 percent to 4 percent range.

Taken as a whole, the Caribbean's population-weighted growth rate came to 3 percent per annum. To be sure, a 3

percent growth rate, extended over a twenty year period, is an accomplishment that should not be dismissed.

Nevertheless that growth rate is substantially lower than the growth experienced in East Asia and the Pacific (a region dominated by China) and South Asia (where India dominates). Furthermore, the Caribbean's growth rate falls below the level experienced elsewhere in the developing world, the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the other nations of Latin America.

When viewed through the prism of the United Nations Human Development Index, the Caribbean experience is similarly less than favorable. Table 4 provides both the numeric ranking and percentile ranking for the Caribbean in 1990 and 2007. The latter is provided because it eliminates the impact of the increased number of countries included in the index between those years. Both essentially tell the same story. Only three (Antigua and Barbuda, St.Kitts and Nevis and St.Lucia) of the twelve West Indian countries possessed a higher percentile ranking in the later year than in the earlier. In the case of St. Lucia this improved percentile ranking occurred even as its absolute ranking among countries declined from 65 on the list to 69. But all of the others experienced declines in both measures.

Indeed, the declines for Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and

Table 4

CARICOM Countries Human Development Index Numeric and  
Percentile Ranking, 1990, 2007

Country	Numeric Rank			Percentile Rank		
	1990	2007	Change	1990	2007	Change
Antigua/Barbuda	53	47	+6	67	74	+7
Barbados	20	37	-17	87	80	-7
Belize	73	93	-20	54	49	-5
Dominica	52	73	-21	67	60	-7
Grenada	54	74	-20	66	59	-7
Guyana	92	114	-22	42	37	-5
Jamaica	63	100	-37	61	45	-16
St.Kitts/Nevis	68	62	+6	57	66	+9
St.Lucia	65	69	-4	60	62	+2
St.Vincent/Grenadines	66	91	-25	59	50	-9
Suriname	56	97	-41	65	47	-18
Trinidad/Tobago	30	64	-34	81	65	-16
Unweighted Mean	58	77	-19	64	58	-6

Source: Computed from United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1992*, Table 1, Human Development Report 2009, Table H

Jamaica were precipitous (at least 16 percentile places).

Taking all the countries of the region into account, the unweighted mean percentile decline was about 6 percentage points.

With only a limited use of advanced technology in production, and exposed to unprotected market competition, the Caribbean was devastated by the global economic crisis that started in 2008. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, negative economic growth was experienced in 2009 in ten of thirteen CARICOM

nations, (exceptions being Belize where the output level remained the same and Guyana and Suriname where the growth rates declined but did not become negative). Elsewhere the decline in output was dramatic: in St. Kitts and Nevis the growth rate was -11.1 percent, in Antigua and Barbuda -10.9 percent, and Grenada -8.3 percent. More moderate though still substantial declines were experienced in Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and St. Lucia (ECLAC 2010, Table A-3).

#### 4. Emigration and Economic Growth

With regard to the short run as well as the long run, it is important to assess why the region has not been more successful in constructing economies that can participate successfully in the global economy. It is not just that these economies have been vulnerable to the shock of the global financial crisis. Compared to other small economies such as the Asian "Tigers" Hong Kong, Singapore and the African nations of Botswana and Mauritius, Caribbean nations over the longer term have not taken advantage of the opportunities that globalization has made available (World Bank 2009 i).

Explaining why this is so requires addressing two inter-related failings: why integration has stalled; and

what accounts for the fact that the region has not achieved a high level of technological competence. Both of these issues have been the subject of extensive separate discussions. But so far as I know the hypothesis that they may have a common source - namely, the region's huge outflow of people - has not been considered by scholars who study the region. And yet nothing more differentiates the countries of the Caribbean from nations elsewhere - not even smallness of size - than the scale of the emigration that the region has experienced. The magnitude of the outflow of people cannot help but have exercised a powerful influence on efforts to achieve both regional integration and modernization.

Estimates of global migration rates have been prepared by Frédéric Docquier and Abdeslam Marfouk who provide data for emigration rates to OECD countries for the period 1965-2000.<sup>2</sup> According to these estimates, the emigration rates for CARICOM countries are the highest in the world. The data in the first column of Table 5 indicates that 37.7 percent of people born in a CARICOM nation live outside of the region in one of the developed nations. What this means is that the out-migration from the region is more than three times the level of even Central America, a region

Table 5  
Emigration Rates CARICOM Countries, 1965-2000

	Rate of Emigration	Rate of Skilled Emigration	Rate of Skilled Emigration (16 years or more)
Antigua/Barbuda	37.6	66.8	79
Barbados	32.3	63.5	76
Belize	29.0	65.5	73
Dominica	40.8	64.2	67
Grenada	53.7	85.1	62
Guyana	42.1	89.0	59
Jamaica	35.3	85.1	53
St.Kitts/Nevis	49.4	78.5	48
St.Lucia	23.1	71.1	45
St.Vincent/Grenadines	36.5	84.5	43
Suriname	47.4	47.9	NA
Trinidad/Tobago	25.2	79.3	17
Population Weighted Mean	37.7	73.3	66

Rate of Emigration and Rate of Skilled Emigration, Docquier and Marfouk 2005, Table A.1-2; Rate of Skilled Emigration (16 years or more), Table 4, Mishra 2006, Annex Table 1

typically associated with high migration rates (Docquier and Marfouk 2005, Table 3).

But what is even more dramatic is the composition of this outflow, and in particular the emigration of skilled labor from the Caribbean. The second column of Table 5 reports that almost 75 percent of Caribbean people with college degrees live in the developed world. The data in this column are remarkable. Virtually all college educated Guyanese (89.0 percent) live abroad and the



percentage is not much lower for Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The population-weighted mean for the region as a whole suggests that two-thirds of well-educated Caribbean people live outside of the West Indies.

The impression of a vast loss is present even when this statistic is adjusted downward to include only those who left the region after age 16, i.e. people who are more likely to have been educated in the region than people who left at a younger age. Because of the lost investment in their education, the emigration of these older migrants is more costly to the region than is the case with individuals who received their education elsewhere. Even this statistic however stands at a very high level though it is lower than the figure for all skilled emigrants regardless of age. In eight of the twelve CARICOM countries listed in the third column of Table 5, more than half of those educated locally were lost to the region and in three others that statistic was in excess of 40 percent. Only Trinidad and Tobago lost less than 20 percent of those who migrated after having received their advanced education in that country.

In recent years much of the academic literature concerned with emigration has pointed to its benefits as well as its costs. Foremost in this regard has been the

attention paid to remittances, funds returned their country of origin by workers who have been abroad for more than one year. Seen in this light, the Caribbean would seem to be a likely candidate to be considered a region that benefitted from emigration. The remittances it received grew in recent years grew more than anywhere else in the world. As a percentage of GDP its remittances are the highest in the world (Mishra, 11).

But while it is true that the region has been the recipient of a substantial and growing inflow of remittances, the emigration which triggered that revenue stream is associated with costs as well as benefits. In Prachi Mishra's calculation, the cost side involves the income and earnings that did not occur because of the emigration, the externalities that were lost because of that exodus, as well as the losses associated with the investment that was made in émigrés' education.

Table 6 reports the results of Mishra's calculations. In ten of the twelve Caricom countries, the losses associated with emigration exceeded the dollar value of remittances over the period 1980-2002. In the cases of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the losses were quite high, in excess of 10 percent

Table 6

Losses and Remittances Associated with High Skill  
Emigration as Percent GDP, 1980-2002

Country	Loss	Remittances	Remittances- Loss
Antigua/Barbuda	13.2	3.0	-10.2
Barbados	18.5	2.3	-16.2
Belize	6.8	4.7	-2.1
Dominica	11.5	8.4	-3.1
Grenada	11.0	11.0	0.0
Guyana	9.5	1.9	-7.6
Jamaica	20.4	7.4	-13.0
St.Kitts/Nevis	9.7	6.9	-2.8
St.Lucia	3.8	4.0	+0.2
St.Vincent/Grenadines	10.7	7.2	-3.5
Suriname	7.8	0.5	-7.3
Trinidad/Tobago	16.8	0.3	-16.5
Unweighted Mean	11.6	4.8	-6.8

Source: Mishra 2006, Table 6.

of GDP. Only in Grenada and St. Lucia were losses and remittances approximately equal.

It is important however to consider the consequences of the loss of highly educated individuals more broadly than is done with these data. This is so because of the central importance of human capital in determining the rate at which modern technology can be adopted in an economy. As the World Bank noted in its 2005 report on the region, "cross-country variation[s] in competitiveness, productivity and income are profoundly linked with differences in skills and technology." It went on to

observe that development theorists increasingly place "learning" at the center stage of the growth process. According to the Bank, "'learning' workers, 'learning' firms, and 'learning' regions are winners in the planet-wide, technology driven, hyper-competitive economy" (World Bank 2005, 144). With this the case, the availability of college educated people has to be considered indispensable to development. Conversely an outflow of highly skilled and educated individuals, such as the Caribbean has experienced, should be judged to militate against development in ways that are not captured in the kinds of calculations Mishra undertakes. It simply is not possible to quantify the foregone innovations that the presence of a critical mass of well-educated entrepreneurs might have been responsible for. What is clear however is that the massive emigration that has occurred as has deprived the Caribbean of much of the kind of human capital that modern economic growth requires.

##### 5. Emigration and Integration

But not only is emigration costly with regard to development. It also tends to undermine efforts to achieve regional integration. The Caribbean's high emigration rate means that as West Indian children grow up they see their future prospects as best being advanced outside of their

country of origin. With aspirations attached to the hope that they will be able to leave the region, the proportion of the population willing to dedicate themselves to the process of institution-building that Caribbean integration requires is driven down to a lower level than would prevail in the absence of such emigration.

Insight into this problem is provided by Rosina Wiltshire's discussion of the fact that for the people of the West Indies, "long-term emigration has resulted in pivotal socializing institutions like the family transcending national boundaries." As she puts it, identification with a geographically circumscribed place to which positive attributes are attributed "has not necessarily been part of a Caribbean reality." Wiltshire writes, "children growing up in the donor society receive early messages about the host society as representing the land of opportunity." As a result, "it is no wonder that at the first pinch of economic crisis in the donor territories all roads lead to the alternative home in the North American paradise with massive legal and illegal outflows" (Wiltshire 1992, 177). Migration, in short, shapes childhood socialization in a way that lessens the likelihood that the people of the West Indies will share an

unambiguous identification with the region. A "culture of migration" is created.<sup>3</sup>

The propensity to migrate is of course a response to market opportunities. But that response has been deeply internalized and accepted as the norm by the West Indian people. That is the reason governments of the region have adopted what a leading Caribbean migration scholar has described as a "laissez-faire approach to migration." And it is for the same reason that governmental officials frequently are quoted, as in the case of the Jamaica's Minister of Education in 2001, saying that he "was not opposed to the recruitment of hundreds of local teachers for posts in New York schools," at least partially because many of them were going to teach "our own children of Caribbean origin" (Thomas-Hope 2002, p. 24, 21).

The problem is that if, as Liah Greenfeld argues, nationalism is central to the development experience, the flood of people leaving the West Indies undermines that nation-building, or in the Caribbean context regional integration (Greenfeld 2001, 23-4). When West Indian people look outward to construct their lives, their doing so deprives the Caribbean of the human capital that integration requires. That such an investment is not only required but as well is substantial is testified to by the

committed regionalist Sir Shridath Ramphal when he acknowledges that "the natural state of ...our Caribbean is fragmentation; without constant effort, without unrelenting perseverance and discipline, in suppressing instincts born of tradition and environment, it is to our natural state of disunity that we shall return" (Ramphal 2008, 4). That is, as Gordon K. Lewis puts it, in the Caribbean "...there has always been a sense of common history but little sense of common destiny" (Lewis 1968, 371). Without a strong commitment to the construction of unifying institutions, centrifugal forces in the Caribbean prevail and emigration deprives the region of that commitment.

Thus in the name of Caribbean development and integration it would be desirable to reverse or at least reduce the emigration rate, regional sentiment favors that outflow. But since the nations of the West Indies are electoral democracies, an attempt to impose limits on emigration is not likely even to be attempted, let alone succeed. Few office-seekers in the region would be willing to put their political careers at risk by opposing the freedom that the people of the region possess and value to move abroad without restrictions. The solution to the problem of harnessing the human capital necessary to build

regional unity is therefore not to be found in attempting to curb the outflow.

#### 6. The New Argonauts

The West Indies needs a significant number of its highly educated overseas residents to return home, people who would bring with them both the entrepreneurial ability to advance the Caribbean's use of modern technology and an integrationist perspective. With such characteristics these returning migrants would generally be sympathetic to the kind of modernizing and regionalist economic strategy prepared by Norman Girvan and accepted in principle (but as yet not acted upon) by the CARICOM Heads of Government in 2007.

At the center of Girvan's strategy is a region-wide "entrepreneurial state" that would adopt "common Community policies and support measures" to advance "drivers of economic growth and transformation." These would be clusters of industries centered on energy, agriculture, forestry and fishing, manufacturing, sustainable tourism and other export services. A driver of development, Girvan writes, would "not have to be present in the economies of all member states." Resource availability might require a driver to be concentrated in one or two nations. But to qualify for support it would have to be "...capable of



imparting dynamism to other economies and to the Community as a whole." His anticipation is that these clusters of economic activity and the government support that they receive, will "drive economic growth in the Community as a whole," and achieve levels of development that would be unobtainable in the absence of integration (Girvan 2007, p. 13, 18).

The problem is how to entice returnees when out-migration is responsible, at least in part, for both the limited integration and slow growth that contributed to the outflow in the first place. To address this problem the region would benefit from an examination of the experiences of the developing nations that have succeeded in attracting a return flow of nationals. These returnees in the cases of China, India and Taiwan among other nations, have been described by Annalee Saxenian as the "new Argonauts." With this phrase Saxenian is referring to mobile, highly skilled individuals with work experience in high-tech centers in the developed world. They, she writes, "transfer up-to-date-information and know-how to help their home economies participate in the IT revolution." Saxenian might well have had the Caribbean in mind when she wrote that "developing countries that invested heavily in education ... suffered from a 'brain drain' as their most talented students left

to take advantage of education opportunities abroad." But unlike the experience in the West Indies, elsewhere "a small but meaningful proportion of individuals who left their home countries for greater opportunities abroad have now reversed course, transforming a brain drain into a 'brain circulation.'" Where this process has been successful, these highly educated émigrés, upon returning home, produced entrepreneurial communities that were able to compete successfully in global high-tech markets. Rising incomes and structural transformation have been the consequence (Saxenian 2006, 4, 7, 325). As Michele Klein Solomon of the International Organization for Migration indicates, "some major growing economies in Asia like China, Philippines and India are seeing a shift from brain drain to brain gain, as a result of increasingly pro-active policies to attract back migrants with newly acquired skills and education" (Tesfaye 2008).

The question that arises is whether this process can be replicated in the Caribbean. Can a class of West Indian Argonauts be enticed to play the same role for the region as have returned migrants in nations such as China, India and Taiwan? That such a group of Caribbean people exists is beyond doubt. In the United States in 2000, 25.7% of Jamaicans, 27.5 % of Trinidadians and Tobagonians, and

28.7% of Guyanese were professionals and managers. These were levels not much different from the percentage of non-Hispanic Whites, the group occupying the highest occupational status in that country (Boswell and Jones, 177).

It is clear however that a return flow of highly skilled and educated Caribbean nationals will occur only if they are offered powerful incentives to leave their current locations. For as Saxenian notes, "emigrants usually return home only when they come to believe that their capabilities will be more highly valued in their native environment than in the United States" (Saxenian 2006, 326)." Caribbean policy-makers will have to turn their attention to the Diaspora in ways that has not been the case in the past.

It is likely that the University of the West Indies (UWI) will have to be the focus of a strategy to accelerate growth by attracting highly educated emigrants from abroad. In the Caribbean only that institution possesses the intellectual resources that would allow it to become the kind of technologically sophisticated hub that could attract a reverse flow of high level talent. In this, UWI could follow the model initiated in China where the government launched a project to develop their universities so that they would, as Cervantes and Guellec put it, "not

only provide higher education training but also academic employment and research opportunities" (Cervantes and Guellec). The scale involved in the Chinese experience of course is vastly different than what would have to occur in the Caribbean. But the principle remains the same. If the University of the West Indies were self-consciously to become a hub of technologically sophisticated research and development, it could provide an attractive environment that might convince highly trained and educated West Indian people to return to the region. They could do so in roles that might combine entrepreneurship and academic employment.

Optimism that such an approach could be implemented is found in the fact that in Barbados the same business community that reported that the country's economy lagged in technology, looked favorably on the status of "university-industry collaboration in R&D" in that country. Overall, Barbados ranked 35<sup>th</sup> internationally on this measure, suggesting that in that country at least channels of cooperation are already present between the academy and the business sector and those relationships might provide the basis for further development collaboration. Unfortunately, business people in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are not nearly as impressed with the collaboration

that exists between themselves and the institutions of higher learning. Jamaica ranks 60<sup>th</sup> internationally on the collaboration measure, and Trinidad and Tobago 65<sup>th</sup>, levels that although low are nevertheless in the top 50 percentile globally. Guyana, however is another story: its rank is 117<sup>th</sup>, suggesting that a very large disconnect exists in that country between the University of Guyana and the Guyanese private sector.

But whatever level of hope is derived from these survey findings, the fact remains that to date the kind of return migrant strategy that has been implemented elsewhere is not yet on the regional agenda. There are schemes in place designed to attract retirees. But no concerted effort is underway to create conditions that would be attractive to high-tech Caribbean overseas business people and professionals. Neither the governments of the region nor the University of the West Indies has addressed this area in a serious way.

An "Argonaut" strategy will of course require a great deal of research before it can successfully be implemented. The favorable experiences elsewhere will have to be investigated to determine the extent of their relevance in the Caribbean environment. But just as important, it will be necessary for supportive public opinion to be mobilized.

Altering the course of the country's development and moving it into the world of advanced technology will require a political decision' for which an extended period of discussion and debate is required. A change in course of this kind is never easy to achieve, and there will be opposition.

The formation of a West Indian cadre of "Argonauts" would make it realistic to think that the region could cooperate sufficiently and become technologically sophisticated enough to become a successful participant in the global economy. Failing to initiate a return flow of talent from the Diaspora however risks a future of continued relative decline.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> The most prominent voice dissenting from this consensus has been that of the former Barbadian diplomat Peter Laurie who has written that "In a globalised world economy, we're all better off fending for ourselves. CARICOM has become a drag on the progress of its member states" (Laurie 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Emigration rates were estimated by obtaining the stock of emigrants in the OECD countries and then expressing these estimates as a percentage of the total labor force born in the sending country. Skilled emigrants are those with at least tertiary educational attainment. Docquier and Marfouk. P. 7

<sup>3</sup> This phrase is extensively used in discussions of Caribbean migration. See for example World Bank 2005, p. 136.