

International Working Group Meeting
“Sustainable Regional Education Efforts for
Safer and More Inclusive Communities”

**An Inter-Sectoral Approach to Fostering a
Democratic Culture
in Schools and Local Communities
in the Caribbean**

Presented by

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Salutations

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Jennifer Batton, Global Issues Resource Centre, Cuyahoga Community College, Ohio

Participants from thirty countries worldwide

Participants from Costa Rica

Good Morning

Let me begin by thanking Jennifer Batton for insisting that I come to Costa Rica to share our OAS Democracy Project challenges and successes with you.

Coming from Trinidad with me is the Minister in the Ministry of Education, Hon. Clifton De. Coteau.

When we began this work, Minister De Coteau was a Councillor in the Local Government Sector and I was the Programme Director for International Cooperation Initiatives in the Ministry of Education.

Presently, he is in the Ministry of Education and I am Manager, Communications and International Cooperation in the Ministry of Local Government.

As you can see, we are still working together to develop a culture of participatory democracy in our country and to establish the requisite policies and legislation to guide our actions.

The present project is funded by the OAS and is being executed in three Caribbean countries – Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and St. Lucia.

The overall goal of the project is to contribute to local government transformation through capacity-building and policy development, focusing on youth in schools and communities.

The focus on youth makes it a medium to long-term plan for ensuring that our countries are characterized by good governance through the development of a vibrant and conscious citizenry.

And so, the purpose of the project is to develop and sustain a democratic culture in schools and local communities in the three participating countries.

We envisage five outputs and have planned activities to achieve them.

The activities target capacity-building in the specific areas that will allow the participants to fully understand what is involved in becoming a peaceful society where human rights are respected and citizens participate in decision-making for their communities.

Decision-making also includes the knowledge and understanding about the electoral process.

This knowledge and understanding will begin when students are in the school. It will allow them to make a smooth transition to the local communities then take them as far as local and national elections.

The activities will culminate with a draft policy framework document on "Education (formal and non-formal) for democracy, peace and human rights". A Self Assessment Instrument" comprising a set of Youth Citizenship Competencies is also an anticipated output from the activities. These will be available to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member States to guide policy development with respect to the establishment of opportunities for democratic youth engagement in schools and local communities.

We believe that a wide cross-section of persons will benefit from the implementation of this project.

Before designing this project for three countries in the Caribbean, we designed and executed a pilot project in Trinidad and Tobago to determine the associated challenges and used these to develop the present project.

That project was titled "Capacity-building for developing and strengthening a culture of democracy among youth in Trinidad and Tobago." It was funded by the technical cooperation fund of the OAS and was implemented over the months July to October 2009.

The Ministries of Education, Local Government and Sport and Youth Affairs collaborated on this pilot project, which it included a Youth Forum as one of the activities. Training in Conflict Management was facilitated by Jen and her colleagues Sonia and Madeleine.

Training in the establishment of student councils, community youth councils, service learning, the electoral process and the youth forum was facilitated by Terry Pickeral and Anderson Williams.

These two facilitators also hosted six of the participants in Nashville and Charlotte, USA where they experienced first-hand, youth councils in action.

The outcomes of the pilot project are influencing and informing the present project to move it to successful completion.

When we go into groups we will be able to discuss some of the policies that were developed to stem the tide of violence and indiscipline in schools and explain how the capacity-building is slowly contributing to a more peaceful school community.

We will also discuss the challenges we face as we try to bring about more collaboration among Ministries; among local communities and NGOs; among the Universities and the MOE and the policy development process in the Caribbean.

We hope that by the end of the project, in addition to our planned outputs, we will have more peaceful schools and local communities.