

## **Caribbean Canadian Emerged Leadership Dialogue – 2011**

### **Format and Theme**

We have had a great privilege to participate in the Caribbean Canadian Emerged Leadership Dialogue this May/June. The dialogue consisted of a total of 120 participants representing labour, government, business and community; 80 from the Caribbean and 40 from Canada.

Under the overall theme of the dialogue 'Growth through Connection - Enabling Sustainable Progress,' participants examined the qualities of leadership and “explored strategic areas including governance, regional and infrastructure, innovation in public and private institutions, the environment, sustainable economic growth and social inclusion with the objective of building leadership capacity.”

Participants gathered in Ottawa for the opening plenary sessions, were then divided into 10 groups of 12 with each group experiencing site visits with leaders from labour, business, government and community in different Canadian and Caribbean locations, and again gathering for the concluding plenary sessions in Barbados for the closing. There were a number of presentations each day in each location, making for long hours and extensive scheduling. The organizers of this dialogue were mainly the alumni's of similar dialogues in the past years; our appreciation is extended to them.

### **Qualities of Leadership**

- Leadership skills can be learned and enhanced by engaging with experienced and effective leaders. In each context we saw challenges and solutions and learned about the personal characteristics leaders displayed.
- Participants were exposed to many leaders in the private, public, labour and community sectors. Some of qualities spoken of and exhibited by the leader we met included: vision, strong values respect for people, energy, curiosity, empathy, flexibility, trust, accountable, work hard, and integrity, and the ability to communicate in clear, basic language. In most instances, we observed several of these characteristics at work simultaneously. (There were more than seventeen characteristics of leaders that were identified in our User's Guide for the tour.)

### **Changing World and Changing Leadership**

- CCELD 2011 examined leadership in a changing world characterized by the increasing mobility of capital and people, hyper-competition, and technological change. This change is particularly apparent in communications where the more user-defined Web 2.0, and social networking are changing the way people interact and therefore what it means to be able to lead.
- We are also living in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, with many areas of the world, in particular areas of the Caribbean are still struggling and leaders further challenged in their ability to develop solutions.
- As the world around us changes, so does thinking about leadership. While leadership may traditionally have been seen solely about the one person in an organization who ultimately has the responsibility of making decisions, the ability to collaborate and share information, and the willingness to learn from others inside and outside an organization, particularly youth, are also increasingly important aspects of leadership.
- Having a long term vision and approach is also considered essential. Several of the leaders and organizations visited have been engaged in their respective Strategic planning processes.
- There are leaders at all levels, in all organizations and we can learn from each other regardless of our age, experience or background.
- Any organization, public, private or community sector must see short term and long term leadership itself as one of its core strategic priorities, and therefore be willing to invest in leadership through leadership training and succession planning programs.

### **Social and Environmental Sustainability**

- While 'leadership' was at the centre in the CCELD 2011, other significant themes included social and environmental sustainability. While some leaders we encountered were demonstrably more committed than others, leaders from the private, government, community and labour sectors spoke of the need to ensure that leadership includes taking responsibility and for working collaboratively on issues of environmental sustainability and social responsibility.
- Some leaders saw the need to embed sustainability development principles into the work of their organizations, whether it be for environmental protection, and in making an effort to deal with social inequality and poverty through the creation of jobs or provision of social housing, for instance.
- Increasing economic integration and blurring sovereignty are challenging the ability of nations to develop national social, labour and environmental standards, and therefore making leadership in areas of social and environmental sustainability more difficult.

### **Networking and International Solidarity**

- The power of connections, networking and of people is a key determinant to future success. Both sites in the tours demonstrated recognition of the importance of people. There were numerous examples of this at work ranging from the organization of both tours largely being dependent on the connections of the local guides. The communities are small enough that direct relationships could be had with key stakeholders, thus fast-tracking policy and increasing the odds of success.
- The trade union movement is often left out of decision-making. Since the CCELD is inclusive and international in scope, CCELD 2011 was an opportunity to dialogue with emerging leaders both in other sectors, and with emerging labour leaders in the Caribbean about the need to address issues of labour and social inequality. In this sense, the CCELD presented an opportunity for emerging labour leaders in both Canada and the Caribbean to engage in international solidarity.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Not only were the CCELD organizers, and presenters from various organizations in each sector experienced leaders, each of the participants in the dialogues groups were also emerging leaders in their own right. Our conversations while in transit were illuminating. We learned tremendous things from presenters and from each other and began the journey of seeing some issues from another perspective. For many of us it was the first opportunity to dialogue with leaders from other sectors, which was an invaluable opportunity as we engaged and saw through stereotypes of each other. We also reinforced our need to remain critical thinkers as we engaged.
- Trade union movement and its leaders need to adapt strategies which not only reflect the needs of workers in a changing world, but also need to adopt the changing nature of leadership in that world, and to view leadership development as a core strategic priority.
- Leadership comes with time; you are not born with it. Your life experiences and initiatives create the leader that you will be. There are many qualities and personal skills needed to become a good leader. You are as good a leader as reflective with the people around you. You must be respectful, honest, a good communicator and do not expect the people to do something that you are not prepared to do. We need to listen to our peers and give credit where it is due. You must earn respect not demand it.

At this time we would like to take this opportunity to thank CUPE for giving us this life learning experience and will ensure that we will take what we have learnt and use it for years to come in service of CUPE members.

Respectfully submitted by  
Judy Henley and Tim Maguire