Dear SIDS

13/07/19

Dear SIDS,

The following series of letters are my musings, my visions, my heart for our precious islands concerning sustainable development. I can only write from my perspective (Trinidad & Tobago and the Caribbean) but I hope that it may reflect the reality of small islands around the world.

I enjoyed asking the hard questions with hope in mind.

I hope it challenges and inspires you to put on self-love and pursue greatness.

With love,

A Youth of a SIDS
Dear SIDS,

“Would vulnerability not be a better measure of status and sustainability than GDP?”

This is the question that Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley asked the UNGA last year.

Vulnerability is the defining factor of small states. It’s the proneness to adverse effects of changes in environment and the insufficient resilience to overcome these effects. No matter how high the GDP of a small island developing state is, it can’t be sustainable if it can be taken away by one sudden change in the economy.

GDP does not tell us about quality of life, sustainability or even income inequality. It doesn’t depict the nuances of an economy – its level of exposure, resistance and dependency. While more holistic measurements such as HDI have been used over the years, it still doesn’t capture the sustainability of a state. A more vulnerable state, like SIDS, no matter how great their statistics look in any form of measurement, the fact that they have a greater risk of all their progress being erased, threatens sustainability and even survivability. If a state cannot survive it cannot be sustained.

I’d like to counter that question by asking “Would resilience not be a better measure of status and sustainability than GDP or vulnerability?”

You can be very vulnerable but have high resilience (see Singapore). It’s about creating policies and contingency plans in the event of economic, environmental and social disaster. Only then can you really be sustainable. A resilient state assesses and plans for potential natural and man made. This requires perseverance, adaptability and inclusivity.

Sustainable development requires not just visionary leaders but citizenry who can appreciate the value of sustainability and are open to transformative change.

If I tried to imagine what sustainable development looks like in the Caribbean or even in Trinidad & Tobago, I come up short. Maybe it’s just me but it seems like we lack vision. Our plans are short-sighted, and politicians just produce policies to try to maintain their seats.

Of course, I can say that when I close my eyes I see sustainable cities – affordable housing, green spaces, inclusivity, clean water etc. It’s easy to say but hard to imagine. How do we achieve this while taking into consideration our current reality?

I think it starts with our mindsets. We will never effectively achieve sustainable development without first changing our outlook on our country, its vulnerabilities and it’s potential.

With love,

A Youth of a Small Island
19/07/19

Dear SIDS,

I know a Trini’s favourite response to threat of a natural disaster is “God is ah trini” but doesn’t mean we can’t prepare in case He isn’t.

Passivity and ability to never take anything seriously are apparently innate traits. But so is resilience. Our ancestors proved that. Our continued existence as people prove that.

But when do we as a country start planning for the future? When do we start taking proactive measures? When do we learn to become resilient instead of dependent on foreign aid and investment?

These vulnerabilities continue to be acknowledged but is there much that has come of it? How are the governments of SIDS fulfilling their commitments to achieving SDGs?

I’m a bit tired of promises with no follow through.

With love,

A Tired Youth of a Small Island
26/07/19

Dear SIDS,

It’s hurts my heart to see us live in fear. That people feel like they have to migrate for peace of mind. It hurts that no matter what we try it seems like crime is out of control.

This is social vulnerability because it undermines social cohesion. Crime and its effects are tearing up the social fabric of our society. We have lost faith in the police service. We look down on certain communities with contempt. Those communities feel disillusioned. Gangs continue to war; we continue to ostracize, and the cycle continues.

One of the sustainable development goals is “No poverty”. Why don’t we tackle that? Why don’t we start looking at the causes of crime instead of trying to solve symptoms?

Poverty-stricken areas are a breeding ground for crime and violence. Sustainability means stopping crime at the root, not just catching criminals.

So how do we begin to change socialization in these communities?

With love,

A Concerned Youth of a Small Island
Dear SIDS,

Asking the hard questions forces us to use the strengths to improve the weaknesses.

Vulnerability is strength. Don’t be afraid of being vulnerable. Face it head on.

It starts in recognizing self-worth. As small islands, we’re accustomed to being told that we’re small and insignificant but that simply isn’t true.

I wish we could stop seeing ourselves through colonial lenses and “third world” categories.

Maybe then we might care about sustainable development because we see value and a future worth fighting for. Maybe then we can close our eyes and imagine a sustainable future. It’s time to build resilience.

With love,

A Youth of a Small Island