

The Latin American Advisor, based in Washington, through its publication *Inter-American Dialogue*, posed the following question to Sir Ronald Sanders on Thursday, July 17th 2014.

FEATURED Q&A

How Successfully Is Caricom Addressing Caribbean Issues?

Q Outgoing Caribbean Community Chairman Ralph Gonsalves on July 1 opened the 35th annual summit of the Caribbean Community, or Caricom, with calls for unity among the members to address issues affecting the region including climate change, economic and immigration issues, all of which will be addressed in the group's strategic plan for the next five years. Gonsalves also called for deepening integration and a single market as the keys to regional development. How successful has Caricom been at addressing the region's most pressing issues? What are the biggest challenges facing the Caribbean, and does Caricom's strategic plan propose the right measures?

A. Sir Ronald Sanders, consultant and former Caribbean diplomat:

"Caricom is a collective of its governments. It can only address the region's most pressing issues if all governments are willing to move in unison. The most pressing common issue is unemployment. The second (except for Trinidad and Tobago) is the high cost of energy. Many countries also have high debt, growing fiscal deficits, no access to large sums required for financing infrastructure, including alternative energy projects, or to low-cost borrowing from international financial institutions.

Deepening integration and a single market can contribute greatly to improving the region's current situation and its prospects, especially through production integration by the private sector and collaborative approaches by governments to debt forgiveness and rescheduling and raising money for jointly owned projects.

The strategic plan proposes desirable measures, but the absence of detail of how they are meant to address the most pressing problems, the machinery by which this will be done, and how the measures will be implemented does not permit meaningful analysis or conclusions. The secretariat is strapped for cash as are many of the governments, a few of which are struggling monthly to pay wages, service debt and provide basic goods and services.

It is difficult to see how the plan will be funded unless there is committed financing from external agencies on a predictable basis, but such agencies will want a legally binding plan with legally empowered machinery for implementation and governance. Caricom is not there yet, although an agreed strategic plan is, at least, an important step."