

GFAR Constituent Assemble

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CaFAN (Caribbean Farmers Network) Position Paper

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Pamella Thomas

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart”. *Nelson Mandela*

And so today I can only speak to you in a language that comes to my heart from the over 500,000 farmers I represent throughout the Caribbean

Region. To do so I must ask. How many doctors do we have in this room today? How many of you doctors are willing to leave your doctoral positions to become farmers? Not Agriculturalist, Farmers/Producers.

It was refreshing to me when I read through the GFAR papers sent to me online in preparation for this forum finally, I exhaled, the need to reform agriculture in an effort to benefit farmers, in particular small farmers – who I represent.

CaFAN is new to GFAR, and while the process and the concept may be new to us the need for Research and innovation in agriculture are the engine of our mandate.

I wish for us to ponder the enabling mechanisms for these sectors:

1. Tourism
2. Education
3. Sports
4. Fashion
5. Music

In each of these instances resources such as capital, infrastructure, incentives, equipment and capacity development have all been directly allocated to the individuals who make these sectors viable.

Let us take sports and more specifically Basketball or Football. When potential is being spotted in an individual, the potential is harnessed, by that I mean enormous investment is made to ensure that the potential is developed, it becomes viable and that it is sustained.

I therefore advocate that this is the innovation that Farmers need to develop agriculture, make it viable and to sustain it.

I am almost persuaded to believe that international bodies do not seriously want to eradicate hunger or to alleviate poverty neither do they intend to adhere to the woes of food insecurity. When I started my career as a young primary school teacher I recall in preparation for one of my science lessons on Pollution, I came across a very damning statement “Humans have created a very catastrophic environmental disaster because of their shortsightedness”. Today that disaster has evolved into what we now term “Climate Change”. Ironically, we are doing the same thing. Examine the ages of our farming population, the living condition of our farmers, and the

bargaining and advocacy capacity of our farmers. Will we wait for farmers to become extinct, thereby creating another catastrophic phenomenon?

So to GFAR I dear say after say after 20 years of injecting into research, whilst the gap between research and viable productivity widen it is now time to be innovative. Let's marry - Agriculture Research and Farming.

Finally, I implore this Assemble, to put the necessary structures in place that will employ the bottom-up approach for effectively empowering farmers. By doing so, research findings will become applicable, technicians will be meaningfully engaged, administrators will be productively employed and policy makers will be strategically engage.