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**The Need for a Strategic Partnership – Who Does What?
The Case of the Strategic Partnership between the Government
of Barbados and the Barbados Coalition of Service Industries**

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THE NEED FOR A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP – WHO DOES WHAT?

THE CASE OF THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF BARBADOS AND THE BARBADOS COALITION OF SERVICE INDUSTRIES

Introduction

A working definition of “Strategic Partnership” is *“a mutually beneficial cooperative relationship where decision-making is shared between the partners so that they each achieve strategic goals and value that they could not accomplish on their own”*. The most common reason for entering into strategic partnerships is the belief that the expected synergies exceed the existing status quo. Among the most desirable benefits, especially as it relates to service exporting strategies, are increased access to markets, contracts, finance mechanisms, innovation and technology, training, human and other similar resources, all leading to the most significant access of all, that of income. This is usually conceived in the context of the private sector, however this can also operate for the effective management of any public-private sector partnership especially when the genus of the partnership is the development and execution of national economic development initiatives such as the implementation of a national export promotion strategy.

Effective integration and coordination are the principal elements which must characterize the partnership - it makes the best use of resources, helps create cohesion, and avoids the confusion that can be created when stakeholders have to navigate their own way through a multiplicity of agencies. It is therefore important to have a very clear but flexible definition of who does what both within the core partnership and within the surrounding/supporting framework of other public and private sector entities. Attaining effective integration and coordination can be difficult, because it often requires existing departments or agencies to accept a more limited role - an objective likely to meet with some resistance.

Who Are The Partners And Why

The Government of Barbados recognizing the CARICOM initiative to establish an umbrella regional coalition, composed of national coalitions, to represent the services sector facilitated the formation of the Barbados Coalition in Service Industries (BCSI). The BCSI was not only seen as a vehicle to foster a regional coalition but has become the Government’s strategic private sector partner in pioneering a new national economic development initiative premised on services exports. The Government’s side of the partnership is represented by the Ministry of Industry and International Business - the synergies between the mandate of the BCSI and this government department being the main rationale for this choice.

The Government: Government as a Facilitating/Funding Agency

After facilitating the setting up of the BCSI the Government recognized that in order for the BCSI to function effectively, the government had to financially support the entity in its embryonic stages until such time as the organisation could stand on its own, as its membership were as yet unable or unwilling to support the BCSI financially in its infancy. And so, initially, the Governments’ major role was and continues to be that of financier, providing ‘start-up capital’ for the Coalition, placing major emphasis on the establishment of a Secretariat and the creation of a website as critical developmental processes to be completed before the organisation was fully empowered to undertake its broader export focused mandate.

Having undergone a successful process of operationalization, funding for the Coalition is provided by the government on a project basis at the beginning of the financial year, where the budget is assigned based on a number of projects which the strategic partners together discuss the operations and the expected outcomes. The main projects focus on those activities that have direct export promotion, income generation aims, such as trade missions.

The Coalition, though dependent on public funds, is essentially Private Sector driven – the members are the principal constituents and stakeholders. This arrangement provides the Coalition with the independence needed to operate according to commercial disciplines, to be flexible in adapting to the needs of its stakeholders and to be efficient, dynamic and non bureaucratic in managing its projects. Further, the positioning of the Coalition as a private sector driven entity means that continuity is ensured even in the face of changing governments. Bearing all of the above in mind, the government as financier continues to ensure the required measure of accountability for its partner as these are after all, public funds. However this is done without infringing upon the organization's freedom to independently implement strategies to achieve the shared vision.

“Not Only A National But A Regional Responsibility - To Ensure Quality”

In the case of the Barbados being the first of the CARICOM territories to successfully implement and a National Coalition of Service Industries, the accountability of government extends also to CARICOM since it is envisioned that the ultimate aim is to establish a regional coalition. Therefore, the Barbados' government ensures that the BCSI is a well-designed, well-managed entity, which can become part and parcel of a regional coalition as well as becoming a benchmark for the other countries. The Government has been prepared to lend its support in ensuring that the leadership and other human resource inputs for the Coalition are optimized such that the Government and Coalition's strategic partnership can be effectively blue printed for feeding into the efforts of other members states in establishing their own national bodies.

Creating An Enabling Policy Environment

As an investor, one of the critical challenges which the government must address, is to determine what aspects of public policy have an impact on the economic benefits to be gained from the development of the services sector and the enhanced performance of services exporters. With this in mind the Barbados Government continues to impart to the Coalition aspects of the policy necessary for the Coalition to know so as to carry out its objectives and to support the Government's vision. In order for the vision not to become stagnant the associations must be able to play a part in influencing changes to the policy and this can occur by Government hearing the voices of the members through their body, the BCSI. The associations are able to insert themselves into the process via the Coalition. It is therefore very important that the Coalition provides a mechanism that this can occur.

The Coalition: the Coalition In Relation To The Strategic Partnership

Being cognizant of the CARICOM's initiative of setting up a regional coalition, the BCSI's sees its mandate as setting up and operating a well designed, and organized Coalition, which can be used, as a benchmark for the other countries as well as playing its role in the regional Coalition whenever it is operational. The Coalition's main focus is to promote export activities among all of Barbados' service providers. In order to accomplish its mandate in the Coalition must recognise that it has to buy into the strategic partnership arrangement with the Government of Barbados and be willing to work with the Government. The Coalition must see this partnership as a way to achieve its objectives even though this entails giving up some part of its sovereignty.

Once the Coalition has fully entered into the relationship as a joint partner it must buy into the Governments' vision for services and aspire to help to fulfil this vision. It must then relate this vision to its members through education in order to ensure that its members are at the forefront in helping Barbados to achieve the vision. It is important that the Coalition not be seen as an extended arm of government and is recognized for possessing an independent sphere of agency reaction, and responsibility within the Private Sector even while buying into the Government's vision and being a recipient of Government's funding. Stakeholders need to trust in the objectivity of the Coalition to represent their interests.

The Coalition as a Lobbyist

One of the Coalition's critical roles is to lobby the Government for changes to policy, legislation and other regulations may which impede the export drive of service providers. It must be unafraid to raise pertinent issues knowing that its voice may not immediately be heard or the issue dealt with as the Government has its own timeline. However it must persevere in its lobbying efforts. The need for increased flexibility in how services firms can operate and structure themselves is one of the fundamental issues which must be brought to the attention of the Government by the Coalition in order to ensure that those service providers with high potential to export are not impeded by the Country's domestic laws or regulations.

Providing Feedback is Essential

In order to assess the impact of domestic regulations and policies, one of the critical terms of the partnership the Coalition has with its government is to provide informed feedback on trade related matters, including draft legislation, treaties, and market access. This is done by explaining and distributing trade-related information from CSME, FTAA, ACP-EU, and WTO trade agreements, or information from government departments to BCSI members, and then receiving, collating, and sending feedback information back to the relevant government ministries. Therefore maintaining a close relationship with its members so as to quickly gain valuable and relevant information is one of the features that must characterize a services coalition. The Coalition thus provides feedback to the Ministry in order to assist the Government in its decisions and policies.

Facilitating The Regional Integration Process

Within the context of fostering the overall development of the region's service sector the Coalition also plays a vital role of facilitator at the regional level. Given that the export promotion strategy being undertaken by the Barbados Coalition is focused on increasing trade among CARICOM territories, the Coalition is thus an important vehicle through which the Government can achieve its mandate to facilitate the regional integration process. The Coalition, can with the support of Government be able to communicate the importance to the other Countries of getting their Coalitions up and running and also communicate to the people of the region the benefits of playing a part in the setting up and operation of the Coalitions. The Coalition can more easily communicate to its neighbours that Barbados is open to their service providers, and that regulations put in place for regional integration will be honoured by the Government of Barbados'

Conclusion

The Barbados Coalition and the relationship it has with Government is an example of an alliance where the terms of the partnership, the roles of the partners and the accountability to the various stakeholders are clearly defined and well managed. One of the Characteristics is the willingness to constantly reassess and strategize in partnership in order to achieve the common goal.