

## **Stabroek News -- Thursday December 19, 2002**

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### ***Editorial***

#### **A major achievement**

The rewriting of the National Development Strategy under the overall supervision of Dr. Kenneth King is perhaps the outstanding achievement of civil society in recent times. It will be recalled that in 1991 President Cheddi Jagan had approached the Carter Center seeking help in the formulation of such a strategy. The Carter Center agreed to provide financial and technical assistance in the preparation of a first draft which was published in 1996. However, it was felt that though many knowledgeable Guyanese had contributed to the preparation of that document (in fact a multi-volume report) the management of the project had not been in Guyanese hands. Also, the main opposition party objected to it being put forward as a national strategy as it was felt it would be used by the governing party as its manifesto for the elections due in 1997.

That draft was therefore not brought to Parliament. However, the Carter Center after later consulting the then Minister of Finance, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, approached a number of Guyanese who agreed to participate in the formulation of a second and final draft. They would be in full control of the process. In September 1998 a broadly representative national civil committee was assembled. There were five co-chairpersons to co-ordinate and manage the process. They met the leaders of all the parliamentary parties and explained the intention to rewrite the strategy and the procedures that would be followed.

The work was then extensively revised and rewritten by those involved, not just updated. To quote from the new document, "Their rewriting of the chapters entailed, in many cases, changes in philosophy, substance and thrust. Put in another way, the entire strategy has often been changed and entirely new sectoral versions have been put forward in some instances. Change was not made for change's sake, however. Indeed, whenever it was realized that the early drafts still met the requirements of Guyana's future development, they were substantially retained."

In carrying out its work the committee relied on local expertise and on the existing reports of consultants and others. The new one-volume final draft was completed in the year 2000 and was circulated and published. Though it is not, as it says itself, a national development plan it reviews every sector of the economy and deals with other issues like education, health, urban development, land, housing, the family, labour and employment, the private sector, and poverty-eradication.

The National Development Strategy is a comprehensive document and ought to be read by all those involved in public life at any level to give them a better appreciation of the real developmental issues that face Guyana and of the possibilities that exist. Indeed when reading it even cursorily, one cannot avoid a profound sense of sadness at how much of our energies have been wasted in fighting each other and in sterile bickering over essentially trivial matters while the challenging and exciting prospect of developing our country remains on hold. There is so much to be done that could bring out the best in our people by giving them a real vision of progress. Indeed, one senses that much of the destructive hatred that now threatens to destroy us springs from the stagnation of the last four decades which has led to the diaspora and a profound loss of hope by those who have remained.

It is indeed heartening to know that our society is still capable of putting together such a document and it will be a great pity if it is completely wasted.

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