

Rachel-Ann Charles - Postgraduate Conference on Caribbean In/secureities and Creativity

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Biography: Rachel-Ann is a Research Assistant at The Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research and a Visiting Tutor within the School of Media at Birmingham City University, United Kingdom. She is also a PhD candidate at Birmingham City University and her main research focuses on the impact assessment of community media initiatives. She also has an interest in many other areas such as gender, poverty, and cultural studies.

Title: Examining creative solutions to youth employment insecurities in Trinidad and Tobago through the use of “community media projects”

Abstract:

Trinidad and Tobago are the leading oil and gas production economy in the Caribbean. Countless reports prove the significant contribution oil production makes to this nation's economy. This twin island is also one of the foremost global exporters of methanol and ammonia to the U.S market (IHS Chemical, World Methanol Analysis 2013; FERTECON Ammonia Outlook 2014). However, some may argue that this resource-rich country remains heavily reliant on revenues generated by gas production. Although Trinidad and Tobago have succeeded, to a limited extent, in diversifying the economy from energy to manufacturing, services and eco-tourism, it currently faces youth unemployment as a major economic insecurity. More recently, several local economists including Hosein (2016) have issued statements warning the Trinidad and Tobago Government that failure to reform the economy particularly in areas of economic diversification can result in a repeat of the 1989 IMF Structural Adjustment Loan fiasco. Hosein (2016) and others argue that economic diversification will reduce risk and ensure long-term industrial development. In this vein, I use my presentation to examine the concept and importance of economic diversification in light the brief situation analysis outlined above.

There have been continuous debates about the industrial value of creativity and culture in societies (see the works of Eleonora Belfiore). The basic idea is that wealth and income-generating opportunities can be obtained through individual creativity skills, talent and local culture. In this vein, I present some of the findings from my impact case study of the Shoot To Live project, a community media project in Trinidad and Tobago, which explores creative and social entrepreneurial outlets as one of the solutions to Trinidad and Tobago's economic insecurity.

Keywords: *youth unemployment, economic diversification, community media*

Is youth unemployment on the rise in Trinidad and Tobago? A report by the Youth Unemployment and Labour in the Caribbean, Caribbean Knowledge Series (Parra-

Torrado, M., Bofinger, H. and Placci, F. (2014) states that Caribbean youth unemployment levels are the highest in the world. Published statistics from the Central Statistical Office (CSO) "shows that in the 15- 19 age group, the unemployment rate for the third quarter of 2014 was 19 percent, while in the 20- 24 age group the rate was 6.8 percent in Trinidad and Tobago." According to the International Labour Organisation, Youth unemployment pertains to people between the ages of 15-24 qualified for work but who remain unable to locate employment. Although youth employment has reduced within most recent years, the current report illustrates that although an estimated 86,800 persons are eligible to work within this labour force, 10,500 youths are unemployed (Mark, 2012). The former Minister of Labour's main concern is that the youth employment figures will continue to increase. The Trinidad and Tobago's National Youth Policy (Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, 2012) identifies employment as one of the key concerns for young people. Education, training and employment remain a problem for youth residing in Trinidad and Tobago and for this reason the government recognises the need to generate additional employment for youth (Mark, 2012).

These job insecurities can lead to several adverse effects. A report titled *The Imperative of Youth Employment For Sustainable Development In The Caribbean* (2015) outlines several causes and potential consequences of youth unemployment. The article identifies "poverty, high juvenile crime rates and reduced disposable income" as some of the effects encountered by young people with unemployment predicaments. Another complication to the youth unemployment equation particularly in Trinidad are the communities that remain prone to multiple risk factors; they include high levels of severe crimes (murders, woundings, shootings and robberies), limited access to resources, poor health, poverty, low educational attainment and unemployment. As a result of these social dilemmas, there is a legitimate concern about exploring the ways in which the Trinidad and Tobago government can address these anxieties.

What's more is that Trinidad and Tobago are in a financially precarious position because of a decrease in oil and gas revenue. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission team lead Canetti (2016) reports that "Trinidad and Tobago's economy is confronting a major shock with the sharp fall in energy prices that accelerated through early 2016." Also, the report details government subsidies pending reviews, which can directly affect youth (see more in the IMF 2016 report). An examination of previous studies in a large selection of European countries conducted by economists Choudhry, Marelli and Signorelli (2012) prove that "financial crises have an impact on the youth unemployment rate. Therefore based on these facts, one can deduce that the current state of the Trinidad and Tobago economy will negatively impact on the youth unemployment rates.

These economic discussions have raised another matter of contention. Local economists Hosein (2016) are warning the Trinidad and Tobago Government that their failure to reform the economy particularly in areas of economic diversification can result in a return of the 1989 IMF Structural Adjustment Loan debacle:

“Unless we diversify the Trinidad and Tobago economy, within three years time to five years, we could be going to Washington to meet some of those guys in the lovely suits who sometimes come to visit T&T. They visited us for a period in 1986 to 1989. They’re called the IMF.”

(Hosein, 2015 and 2016)

Hosein (2016) and Conrad (2015 and 2016) argue that economic diversification will reduce risk and ensure long-term industrial development. Local economist Conrad 2015 advocates for the development of "a non-energy sector" (Conrad, 2015 and 2016). In other words, these scholars are calling for a shift in focus from the production of oil and gas in Trinidad and Tobago to a wider range of economic activities.

One can then ask how to expand local economic pursuits? In examining some of the best practices around the world, it is evident that many regions have successfully developed lucrative creative and cultural sectors. There have been continuous debates about the industrial value of creativity and culture in societies (see the works of Belfiore). The basic idea is that wealth and income-generating opportunities can be obtained through individual creativity skills, talent and local culture. Thus far reports demonstrate that the UK, Germany, France, Italy and Spain are Europe's biggest earners from these industries. The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (2016) in their latest report states that the UK's Creative Industries are now worth £84.1 billion per year to the United Kingdom's economy.

Around the world, several regions have experimented with community media projects as a solution to youth unemployment insecurities. Namely, Camara Ahi Nos Vemos project in Mexico, the Children's Media Center (CMC) in Kyrgyzstan, and the Youthworx project Australia (UNESCO, 2001). Lewis (2006) refers to community media as media "of, for and by the people." From my research community media can be categorised as broadcast or nonbroadcast media. Findings from my research prove that community media projects are fixed term media projects that can use a combination broadcast and nonbroadcast media, training and a range of skills. Are community media projects practical solutions to youth unemployment insecurities in Trinidad and Tobago?

As part of my doctoral studies at the Birmingham City University, I examined the Shoot To Live community media project in Trinidad and Tobago. The concept of Shoot to Live is providing a “positive alternative” specifically for young men who struggle to negotiate life within a culture of violence in some parts of Trinidad and Tobago. This pilot project occurred during the periods of May 2011 and ended in September 2012 in the Beetham Gardens and Diego Martin communities. This project targeted persons between ages 12-18 and lasted over a 15-week period.

According to the YMCA, the success of this project was measured by the project’s capability “to address gender issues of young men and build social and emotional competencies through life skills workshops and to document matters that tell a story using photography and videography” (YMCA Trinidad and Tobago Inception Report, 2011). Essentially Shoot to Live is a combined approach of Life Skills, Photography and Videography activities. The design of the photography training allowed participants to learn the functions of a basic digital camera, practise using digital cameras and review photographs in life skills session for further discussions. The project included taking pictures at historical and culturally meaningful locations in Trinidad and Tobago. Likewise, the videography encouraged participants to learn the various aspects of filmmaking, pre-production and production of a short film. Discussions followed each of those above-mentioned activities. These events ended with an art exhibition, and graduation.

Though there were a number of successes in this project, one of the main issues I identified is the contention of sustainability. There are potential ways these problems can be mitigated in the future, such as utilising the social enterprise model. Social enterprise is broadly defined as the use of market-based or business acumen and civil society approaches to address social issues (Gray, Healy and Crofts 2003:141-154; Kerlin 2009). The social enterprise framework can be viewed as an innovative response to the funding problems of non-profit organisations, which are finding it increasingly difficult to solicit private donations and government and foundation grants (Dees 1998). However, critics of the social enterprise concept assert that the major challenge is the underlying understanding of this terminology, which prohibits further local and cross-regional dialogue and investigation (Kerlin 2009). Accordingly, social enterprise models exist in various forms across the globe. For instance, the Youthworx Media project uses a social enterprise model, this project has only received seed funding and has been self-sustainable ever since.

In seeking solutions to the insecurities faced in the Caribbean the danger is adopting western models. One term that can balance the adaptation of best practice is the involvement of members within local communities, which is commonly referred to as co-

creation. Co-creation is defined as “an active, creative and social process, based on collaboration between producers and users that is initiated by the firm to generate value for customers” (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, and Co-Opting Customer Competence, 2000). Through the co-creation process beneficiaries, community members can develop meaningful relationships with external organisations. That feeling of access and empowerment will also come to the fore as community members involved in this process can feel this equal opportunity to collaborate and produce something meaningful for the communities that they belong.

In this presentation, I examined issues around youth unemployment, the need for economic diversification and community media projects as a creative solution to youth employment vulnerabilities in Trinidad and Tobago. Based on the above discussions community media projects have the potential to be a viable solution to youth employment insecurities provided consideration is given to issues of sustainability and context applicability. These discussions prove that creativity has the capability to address some of the insecurities within a Caribbean context.

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