

Pathways to Action: Social Policy in the Caribbean

by *Aldrie Henry-Lee*

Ian Randle

Publishers 2016

277 p.

Illustrated

ISBN: 9766379130, 9789766379131

Review DOI [10.1108/SBR-05-2017-0034](https://doi.org/10.1108/SBR-05-2017-0034)

The poor and the marginalized continue to have unequal access to basic social services and social goods considered valuable. While there are a plethora of social policies, implementation remains a challenge as most Caribbean countries continue to record insignificant economic growth and high levels of indebtedness. *“Pathways to Action: Social Policy in the Caribbean”*, edited by Aldrie Henry-Lee and published by Ian Randle Publishers, brings together a distinguished group of scholars active in the social policy process in the Caribbean, to reflect on the social policy in the Caribbean community region. This book is particularly needed now as emerging social issues of the impact of climate change, human trafficking and increased longevity in the developing countries face us in the twenty-first century when an enabling environment for the effective and efficient delivery of social services is weak in the Caribbean.

In this backdrop, research is essential to secure evidence-based policy formulation and implementation. It is imperative that more students are trained in sociology and social policy so that they may become part of the solutions to these problems. This book serves such purpose and is a wonderful read for anyone interested in social policy in the Caribbean community (CARICOM) region. The policy recommendations in this book can be particularly useful for Caribbean governments, international donor agencies, private sector investors and philanthropists. *“Pathways to Action: Social Policy in the Caribbean”* provides sound advice for the improvement in the formulation and implementation of social policy in the Caribbean. It is not a book just filled with theories but also offers practical advice on the improvement of the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of social policies. This book will encourage students to “think out of the box” and to present new perspectives and theories on social policy in the Caribbean.

This is the *first* book that systematically examines social policy in the English-speaking Caribbean since political independence and proposes policies to enhance human development for the next 50 years. The readers will find a thorough examination of the social policy spread over 314 pages (9 interesting chapters). I am certain that this collection will stimulate discussions in classrooms and policy forums.

The book begins with an interesting chapter by Godfrey St. Bernard entitled “Demographic Transition and Implications for Social Policy in the Anglophone Caribbean: The cases of Bahamas, Barbados, Belize and Jamaica”. This chapter examines the relevance



of the theory of demographic transition. Using secondary data, St. Bernard draws on a sociological imagination to articulate and permit interpretation of the socio-demographic conditions of life and living in Caribbean societies during different periods. The author concludes that social policy in these countries should specifically target certain groups for preventive interventions to modify attitudes, behaviour and outcomes to prevent the recurrence of today's problems in the future.

In Chapter 2, "The Development of Social Policy in Barbados", Alana Griffith and Letnie Rock examine social policy evolution in Barbados from 1962 to 2013. They conclude that in spite of the significant social gains, there is much that can be done to improve the social policy process in Barbados. The authors suggest that the next 50 years will most likely reflect harmonized rights-based policies in sectors such as health, education, social services, human resource development, environment, governance and economics. Basically, this chapter captures social policy evolution in Barbados over the past 50 years (1962–2013). It briefly sketches the social policy orientation preceding that period and concludes with policy for the country over the next 50 years (2013-2063).

In Chapter 3, "Social Development in an Oil and Gas Economy", Innette Cambridge asserts that social policy interventions in Trinidad and Tobago are determined by a philosophy of nationalist development, internal crises such as attempted coups and global initiatives in different areas such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. She points out that the implementation of social policy in the twin island republic is subject to the revenue obtained from oil and gas and that even with the new emphasis on policy development and planning, *ad hoc* decision-making, limited personnel and funds still hamper social service provision. Cambridge claims that in the future, the government needs to address issues of equity and equality among different sections of a diverse population. This chapter closes by summarizing the possible patterns for the future governments' priorities for the twenty-first century.

In Chapter 4, "Poverty and Social Protection Policies in Jamaica, 1962-2012", Pauline Knight reviews poverty and social protection (PSP) policies in Jamaica since Independence. She notes that since Independence, Jamaica has instituted an extensive range of programmes and projects addressing a wide range of threats to socio-economic well-being, after having started with an inchoate set of provisions for welfare in 1962. Over the years, Jamaica's approach to PSP transitioned from that narrow focus of ameliorating conditions for only "deserving" individuals, to having a broad-based objective of combatting the diverse factors that cause poverty and vulnerability. Recommendations are made at the end of chapter e.g. Jamaica should use the International Labour Organization's (ILO) approach to social protection which is grounded in the rights-based approach and seeks to guarantee access to basic income and services for all residents in a country.

In Chapter 5, "Still Short of a Length: Jamaican Labour Legislation and Policy since Independence", Orville Taylor examines the plight of the labour force in Jamaica. He surmises that despite five decades of Independence, and notwithstanding the progress made, the national labour framework still falls short of a length. Even after more than 50 years of Independence, employers can still indefinitely delay the payment of their obligations to workers made redundant. Moreover, they can lay off workers for periods just short of 120 days and not allow them to accumulate the necessary number of days for redundancy to be applicable. This travesty is a violation of workers' rights. Finally, Taylor notes that the move towards flexitime is a good one, but must be finalized within the context of decent work and without loss of any gains workers have made. This along with the demonstrated commitment towards implementing the ILO/CARICOM workplace policy on

HIV/AIDS will increase the level of protection of the workers. He concludes that until these changes are made, the labour laws will still be inadequate.

In discussing the health policies in Jamaica, Stanley Lalta in Chapter 6, “Public-Private Pathways and Jamaica’s Quest for Sustainable Health Financing, 1962-2013”, notes that the striking features of post-Independence health in Jamaica are the seeming contradictory relation between health outcomes and health funds expended to produce these outcomes. Lalta examines the policies, patterns and pathways pertaining to Jamaica’s quest for sustainable health financing over the post-Independence period, 1962-2014. Lalta states that medium-term projections suggest that there will be an escalating resource gap between the demand for and the cost of health services on the one hand, and the availability of resources to meet these costs on the other. To improve health care and access to good quality health care, additional resources need to be generated. Among the strategies, he proposes, includes an increase in consumption taxes on alcohol and tobacco products.

In Chapter 7, “Social Policy and Early Childhood Development”, examining early childhood development in Jamaica, Maureen Samms-Vaughan reports on progress in social policy made by Jamaica for its children, birth to eight years, in the 50 years since Independence. Specifically, she reports on progress in parenting and family support, health, development and education and social support, through the development and implementation of national policies, legislation, plans and programmes. Samms-Vaughan notes that the effectiveness of policies, laws, plans and programmes is best demonstrated by the status of children’s well-being. Examining early child development, Samms-Vaughan reports that for the first two years of life, prior to the commencement of school, there is inequity in father involvement with children and also inequity in resources available to provide stimulation for children. To fulfil our obligations to our children, Samms-Vaughan recommends that we should continue to pass new policies and laws that will further improve young children’s outcomes. Laws ensuring paternity leave and the inclusion of the father’s name on the birth certificate of each child have been passed in many developed countries.

In Chapter 8, “Children and the Policy Process in Jamaica”, Aldrie Henry-Lee examines the main policies that have been developed through the decades that focus directly or indirectly on children and determines that no one theory can explain the policy process from Independence to the present day. Henry-Lee proposes that if we want to obtain adequate provision for the protection of and participation of our children, we must invest more in children. Children must be treated as equal citizens in the designing of policies and programmes. Author suggests that at home, children must be taught rights with responsibilities. The chapter ends with some policy proposals for improving the lives of children in Jamaica, e.g. parents must have access to more parenting workshops and hotlines when they are feeling pressured and need to vent.

In the final chapter, “Ageing and the Evolution of Social Policy – Jamaica 1962-2012”, Denise Eldemire-Shearer asserts that the foundations of healthy old age are laid in utero and childhood, so a life-course-integrated approach is needed. After the establishment of the National Council for Older Persons in 1976, more policy attention was paid to senior citizens. Over time, other social protection programmes were added. The late 1980s and the early 1990s marked a fundamental shift in thinking as Jamaica embarked on the reform of the social welfare system in which empowering persons, rather than assisting them, became the main focus. This represented a shift from welfare to a developmental approach.

Eldemire-Shearer states that for older persons to realize their full potential, mainstreaming ageing into all relevant policies and programmes is the recommended

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approach. This must include provisions for the unique needs of older persons. Eldemire-Shearer notes that individuals too must accept responsibility for the demands associated with their own ageing even as governments provide safety nets and enabling environments. Her analysis suggests that there is political commitment to older persons and the challenge for age advocates is to connect the will to action.

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This book is a wonderful read to understand Caribbean society and how social policy in Caribbean impacts their environment. Personally, it was a pleasure to read this book. The discussion in the chapters has been comprehensive and well researched (supplemented with useful tables and illustrations). This book will not only inspire researchers but also practitioners to be able to translate knowledge and recommendations into practice.

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