

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

25th MEETING OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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**BRIEFING DOCUMENT ON THE PROGRAMME FOR THE PROMOTION OF
LANGUAGES AND CULTURES OF THE GREATER CARIBBEAN**

INTRODUCTION

The Programme for the Promotion of Languages and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean was designed as a multilateral cooperation initiative to promote better knowledge of the various cultures of the Greater Caribbean and seeks to minimize linguistic barriers by strengthening the language skills of nationals of ACS Member States in the main languages spoken in the Caribbean Basin: English, French and Spanish. The aim in this regard is to contribute to the multilingualism of the inhabitants of the region; enhance intra-regional travel and trade; and foster regional integration and cooperation in the area of language learning.

Specific Objectives are as follows:

- I. Strengthen the language skills of nationals of the ACS Member States and Associate Members through intensive immersion courses in French, Spanish and English.
- II. Foster awareness of and appreciation for the cultural diversity of the Greater Caribbean region by facilitating cultural experiences and exchanges as part of the in-country immersion experience.
- III. Institutionalising of the Centre for the Promotion of Languages and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean (CPLC), comprised of a network of regional academic institutions with accredited language training programs, specialising in the teaching of English, French and Spanish.

BACKGROUND

The Greater Caribbean is comprised of an amalgamation of peoples each with their own history, traditions, beliefs, cuisine, languages and various other manifestations of culture. However, this diversity has hindered the establishment of a 'regional identity', and further prevents the formation of a true cultural link among the peoples of the Greater Caribbean. Language diversity in particular, has been identified as one of the most significant barriers to effective communication between the peoples of the region and consequently to regional co-operation and integration among the Member States of the ACS.

In spite of this diversity, the Region is mainly constituted of developing nations where cooperation has become necessary in order to participate and compete effectively in the world's economy. In the era of globalization and the growing inter-dependency of countries, multi-lingualism and cultural sensitivity are two very important keys to constructive communication and cooperation. English, French and Spanish are the three most common languages spoken in

the region, which are among the most spoken languages in the world, and offer the region a competitive advantage, particularly in the fields of tourism and international trade.

Efforts of the ACS in this area began with the implementation of the *Language Training Pilot Project in Foreign Languages for Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) countries*, from April 2002 to December 2003, which was carried out as a jointly funded programme between the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Regional Council of Martinique, the Governments of France and Venezuela and the OECS. This project focused on facilitating French and Spanish language training to citizens of the OECS countries.

The success of this project showed a strong demand for language immersion programs and laid the foundations of important strategic alliances between participating institutions in Venezuela and Martinique. Also identified, was the need to develop enabling mechanisms to meet this demand at the Regional level. A Feasibility Study conducted by the ACS in 2007, for the implementation of Language Training Programs also revealed the high need to develop sustainable mechanisms to support language learning and cultural exchanges among the countries of the Region. Among these mechanisms, it was emphasised to integrate the Promotion of Languages within the framework of the ACS Sustainable Tourism Work Programme and further explore the possibility of establishing a Centre for the Promotion of Languages and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean (CPLC).

THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Efforts of the ACS have focussed on formalising agreements to support the establishment of the CPLC and also establish the framework for the implementation of exchange programs among the ACS countries in the Greater Caribbean for language training and cultural immersion.

As it relates to the CPLC, the Republic of Panama since mid-2007 expressed interest in hosting the headquarters of the CPLC Coordinating Centre, and this offer was formalized with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ACS and Government of Panama for this purpose in August 2008. Subsequently the ACS, on May 25, 2010 signed an MOU with the Centre for Language Learning of the University of the West Indies (UWI/CLL), St. Augustine Campus, which has been identified as the Centre of Excellence for the English language component. The signing of the MOU formalised the technical cooperation to be received from that institution and allowed for other partnership and collaboration activities to promote language learning in the region. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela following up on its commitment identified Colegio Universitario Hotel Escuela de Los Andes Venezolanos (CUHELAV) as the Centre of Excellence for the Spanish Language component, and as Satellite Centre Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV). Negotiations are in progress to formalise agreements with the relevant institutions identified through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Additionally, a Letter of Commitment was signed by the ACS as a regional counterpart of the project to develop the *Guadeloupe International Centre for a Regional Approach on Languages (CIGAREL)*, an initiative of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe which would serve as the Centre of Excellence for the French language Component. L'Alliance Française was also identified as a Technical/ Advisory Partner in this process. The CIGAREL project has been approved for funding by the INTERREG VI Caribbean Space Programme and an MOU has been drafted to formalize technical cooperation with the CIGAREL and L' Alliance Française as part of the CPLC Network.

THE NEXT STEPS

In accordance with the mandates stemming from the Plan of Action of Pétion-Ville as decreed on the occasion of the **Fifth Summit of the Heads of States and/or Governments of the ACS**, held in Pétion Ville, Republic of Haiti on April 26, 2013, and validated by the Regional Tourism Authorities at the annual meetings of the ACS Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism, the focus of future interventions will be centered on facilitating the Language Training Immersion Programs. In that regard, it was agreed that the scope of the program would be to expand the concept of the CPLC to include institutions in ACS Member and Associate Member countries with accredited language training programs that also had the capacity to host students as part of an immersion experience.

The Directorate of Sustainable Tourism has been working closely with the members of the **Working Group for the Promotion of Languages and Cultures**, comprised of Country representatives and participating institutions to establish the necessary structure and support mechanisms for implementation and sustainability of the Exchange Programs. As outlined in the Sustainable Tourism Work Programme, the objective is firstly to create a database of Language Training institutions, and countries have been outreached to begin compiling the list of institutions that will form part of the expanded CPLC network. Simultaneously, regional partners have been outreached requesting information on scholarships and awards available for language learning. This information will be critical in building the necessary linkages to support both the Exchange Programs and the formalisation of the CPLC network.

Learning through immersion has proven highly effective in cultural acclimatisation and in increasing adeptness and proficiency in a foreign language. As it relates to next steps, efforts are ongoing to select the criteria for the selection of students, the adoption of a common curricula and materials for training in each language, and also to determine the functional aspects related to co-ordination of the exchange programs. The ACS proposes to strengthen regional and international partnerships in order to secure the implementation of these activities.

In the current context of rapidly expanding tourism and to guarantee effective participation in the global economy, linguistic diversity is an asset that can enhance both business and destination Competitiveness. Promoting multi-lingualism in the Greater Caribbean will contribute to a favourable environment for industry and commerce, and further complement initiatives of the ACS to develop multi-destination tourism and promote intra-regional travel within the Greater Caribbean. The inherent language and cultural diversity of the region, allows countries a unique opportunity to build bridges based on the sharing of knowledge and skills to grow the regional as a whole, and contribute to developing the competencies of the human resource. Acknowledging that multi-lingualism and cultural sensitivity are conduits of successful relations, for the ACS, the aim is to reduce barriers and further facilitate better knowledge of and consequently better working relations among the Member States of the ACS. It is expected that this initiative will yield multiple benefits to include, contributing to a favourable environment in support of establishing a common and cohesive Regional Approach to language learning.

In addition to offering a definitive and innovative methodology to promote language learning, the Programme for the Promotion of Languages and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean will contribute to enhancing cultural awareness and understanding, and as such, can be the foundation for a broader regional strategy across sectors.