

Dimensions of Competitiveness in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective

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Thank you for that Cheryl-Ann Forman for that introduction...

Protocol having been already established - distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen a very good Caribbean morning to you.

I'm extremely honored to be given the opportunity to address you this morning.

But firstly, allow me to thank John and Invest Turks and Caicos for making it possible for me to be here.

And secondly, I must thank my friend Grace Lappin of Avalon Partners who put this all in motion back in 2013 when she had the vision to ensure a partnership between Invest Caribbean Now, Avalon Partners and the government of Turks And Caicos especially Hon. Premier Dr. Rufus Ewing and Minister Washington Misick to put the spotlight in New York City on this amazing island.

So it is indeed a privilege for me to finally make it here - three years later - but as the saying goes - better late than never indeed!

There is no denying that the issues we're exploring at this conference today – constructing, enduring and sustainable competitiveness – could scarcely be more critical right now in the global market place.

And so I applaud Invest TCI for taking the initiative and putting the spotlight on an issue that is most especially important in the post Brex-it era in which the TCI and the Caribbean now finds itself – again facing crucial survival and growth challenges ... and as we once more see The International Monetary Fund again lowering its growth projections for both the Caribbean and Latin America to zero this year on the heels of Brex-it.

So to say the challenge on how to become more competitive as a country and as a region and strive in this challenging market place which we find ourselves is immense - is an understatement...

But what's the problem?

Why is the Caribbean being left behind while other developing regions soar ahead here in the 21st century?

Perhaps because the formula we keep using isn't working for us.

Our people and our islands and our region should be doing far better.

So something is obviously wrong - and if we keep looking at the

problem and recommending standard solutions – that is not going to work.

We need to throw out the old play book, and think BIG

- beyond the status quo ...

We need to begin by RE-IMAGINING the Turks & Caicos and the Caribbean for the future

And so There are FIVE major keys I want to highlight today, based on some of the feedback we've heard and the experiences we have had with Invest Caribbean Now in the past five years

... keys which I feel can push us further along as a region and a nation - forward to competitiveness and recovery

... . and no it won't not be a lightning Bolt run - but we must get on the track...

So let's go ... number one... I call this...

THINKING OUTSIDE THE PROVERBIAL BOX

When you look at the story of America's Greatest immigrant, Caribbean born Alexander Hamilton - a man who is still making millions for others today - it is clearly of a man who was way ahead of his time... he had bold ideas that were outside the box at the time...

Hamilton had an absolutely preposterous idea ...

to fund the United States by selling the promise of its future

by making the world and especially the money men

BELIEVE that investing in America made sense

they did not buy into America as it was but as it would become

And that turned into a self-fulfilling promise beyond imagination

Because Hamilton simply convinced others to imagine it ..

So what practical meaning does that have for us today?

We have to begin by IMAGINING a far better future for the Caribbean and for the Turks & Caicos.

And then we must follow our imagination with useful measures

by employing our IMAGINATION

as we never have before ..

to create a specific list of IDEAS, while tapping into the best and brightest among us to develop them and create a unified plan that can be marketed to investors... because at the end of the day .. investors invest in bold vision that can bring returns but first we have to have an attractive outside the box vision to draw them in...

Which brings me to key two...

TELLING OUR STORY, HARNESSING OUR NATURAL ASSETS AND COMPETING FOR OUR WALLET SHARE.

Recently I was in the gym and the TV was on ... as they switched to ads, along came an ad for Kazakhstan. It was urging people to invest there. ... not just come to visit this former Soviet republic - but invest!

Last time I checked, there is no Caribbean nation that that has taken this route. Yet each has an investment agency, with a marketing budget. But no major marketing global call to action... unlike what we see with regional tourism ads...

Why not? The reality is that as a country and a region we are lagging way behind when it comes to telling our investment story.

We are fine with promoting the fact that we have an abundance of sun, sea and sand but we are failing to tell our investment story...

The things that make us stand out as a great investment destination beyond just offering tax incentives. ... assets like...

Our Stability – there are no Isis attacks in TCI or the Caribbean and no political upheavals. That’s something to brag about...

In fact, right now France is now deemed riskier for business than Haiti....

Our abundant resources – we must focus seriously on turning the abundant natural resources we are blessed with into revenue earners to propel our economies further along.

Our fruits, our veggies, our food, our fish, our music, our culture, our art...I can go on... These are significant economic earners that are lying dormant while others are using them to propel their own economies forwards...

Let’s take something as simple as the coconut... I remember growing up in Guyana when the coconut was a major income earner for many micro businesses who made oil from it, feed for livestock and soaps...

Today, everywhere I look there is coconut – the water, the shampoos, the creams, the oil... and it’s coming from Thailand and Brazil - not from the Caribbean ... sad indeed!

Then there is the asset that is Our location...– the region and TCI is the US’ back yard, making it very attractive, very easy to get to and not "time-zone" challenged. No getting up at odd hours of the night to call here.

We also have high literacy rates and the creativity of our people knows no bounds... our human capital is largely literate, speaks many languages, and are creative – whether in the region or in our diaspora - and that is something to be proud about.

The reality is our "product" stacks up against most, but we are falling short in selling and telling our investment story, i.e. the “Promotion – P” of the principles of marketing.

Just as we promote sea and sand tourism, why not promote the fact that we are open for investments too... in TV ads that target specific segments of the global business sphere?

And this includes using Social media to our advantage...

To that end I must congratulate INVEST TCI for starting to use all its social media pages smartly in the past three months to tell its story. But we have to go beyond that...

The reality is that in order to succeed we must be able to harness what we have and think outside the box to spike our growth.

Perhaps in the post Brexit era, TCI may be able to call its own shots and look into the medical business of that herb many love to hate and see it

as an economic engine of growth as Puerto Rico is working on doing along with Jamaica...

And just before you dismiss me as being as mentally challenged as one of our US presidential candidates, I urge you to look at the numbers ...

The legal marijuana market in the US is predicted to rise from US 6 point seven billion dollars this year to US 21 point 8 billion by 2020 and some countries like the Netherlands have begun to export medical marijuana to countries like Canada, Italy, Germany and the Czech Republic.

So ask yourselves – why should they be making all the money from a herb that emerged in our region?

Let's ensure we are thinking outside the box and competing for our global wallet share.

So moving on to Key Number Three...I call it...

HARNESSING THE RIGHT HUMAN CAPITAL AND ENHANCING COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Recently, we at Invest Caribbean Now had the task of having to deal with a regional government who was seeking a major loan refinancing ... the problem was their asset overview presentation was incomplete.

It included a bunch of errors on an excel sheet that was presented to investors... to say they had little luck with this is putting it mildly... but again... the human capital in charge of this lacked the necessary skills set needed for the global market they are operating in and so they lost their competitive edge.

To say it is critical to harness the right human capital if we are to succeed globally and be competitive cannot be stressed enough ...

For instance, if you are going to launch an international bid and the person listed as the contact for questions only speaks one language, then we have a problem. How exactly is this going to work successfully?

Another challenge we are seeing, is the way bids are being presented to a global market of developers. Competitiveness in understanding the global market place you are operating in and realizing people are more into giving a hand up than a hand out is the key.

Which means we must move beyond the notion that what we are offering is so amazing with tax incentives thrown in that everyone must invest their own monies to build a project and then hand it over free of charge in 50 years under a BOLT model... this investment model is not competitive enough for today's market and we have to drop it.

Another point I want to briefly touch on here is how we are presenting ourselves globally - Let's remember we are each a sales person for our nation or our company. Which makes how we present ourselves and network globally is very important as we aim towards greater success.

Which brings me to partnerships - We must also recognize and understand that creative - private and public sector partnerships – locally, regionally, globally and in the Diaspora - is the key to improving our nations, our region, our lives and the lives of the people in this nation –such collaboration will allow us to harness resources to be more sustainable in the global economy.

It has been the key to ICN's growth in the past five years - and it is something I strongly advocate...

Which also means we in the Caribbean must move beyond petty politics and arrogant perceived power and understand that our growth as an island – and as a region – is tied to relationship building globally –

whether with other regional nations, the Caribbean Diaspora, the US, China, Europe, Africa or other areas around the world.

I recently saw a great statement on Facebook that made me stop and think for a moment – and most of you know that’s rare on FB with so much information bombarding you.... The Instaquote said ... “successful people build networks, others just look for work.”

Let’s make sure we are building networks ... networks that also offer strict safeguards against all forms of corruption and cronyism and help the entire development process thrive and not just survive.

Ladies and gentlemen, the competitive nature of the global market place demands such action and we cannot be left behind in 2016. We must think global and act global for the betterment of our people.

There is no way any one of us - whether in government or the private sector - is smart enough to do it alone – but through collective respectful efforts and partnerships and consultations - we can move our nations, our economies, our businesses and our people to higher heights globally.

And that brings me to KEY 4

I call it - GROWING THE MIDDLE

Too often, the main complaint I hear from entrepreneurs in the Caribbean is their struggle to access capital to grow. Yet every economist would tell you - growing the middle level of the economy – the industry level, where the private sector sits –the manufacturing, agribusiness and the services industries - is key to growing a successful economy.

Why? Because this is the level where wealth is actually created. It is at this level that the economy can be most energetic, innovative and inclusive.

I applaud TCI for working to boost the access to finance, for the micro-enterprises and SMEs that can be grow into large enterprises.

We need to intensify our focus on this market segment as it is the key to creating new jobs and spurring economic growth regionally...

And I look forward to the day ICN can launch a SME fund for the region that helps boost this creative market segment that should be thriving but is stifled and stagnant because of a serious lack of access of capital.

When you look at the Singapore model and their growth - it is largely in part due to the substantial growth of SME's and this includes incorporating massive technological change and international competitiveness to increasing quality and output.

This is what gives hope and brings the vision to reality for the young student who dreams of creating an app to better his life and his community...

For the single mother with an idea to start her own company and hire others locally.

Or the father who works a 9-5 job but secretly dreams of launching out and running his own business.

We must support our innovators within while also pushing small businesses to be more innovative ... creating goods and services that can make our nations stand out ... beyond just sun sea and sand tourism...

And while we do that let's also focus on ensuring we are bringing our A-game on both sides – both in the private and the public sector ...

Ensuring competitiveness in response times must be a top priority for us as a government or a company - and this includes every little facet -

from email responses, to a response to a contact query on your website, to phone calls being returned, to contract and bid releases, to licenses being approved, to payments being made.. and on and on

This is the number one critical feedback I hear too often on the region and frankly I'm tired of hearing "you know your people" or "it's about time" when it comes to our region - because at the end of the day, timeli-ness translates into productivity and of course productivity into competitiveness.

Which brings me to my last key and that is...

FOCUSING ON TECHNOLOGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

We must harness technology to be more competitive and stay competitive.... Especially in an era where you can live and work anywhere as long as there is a decent internet connection...

In the USVI right now, they have launched a Research and Technology Park ... which is drawing a lot of tech companies off shore to set up shop there and invest in the future of the island – its young people – through jobs and training.

This is a stellar move for an island struggling to survive in this tough economy but combining technology while including the next generation who are way more tech savvy than many of us right now.

This ensures they stay competitive and this is a model many other regional nations should be eyeing. We need to establish our own Silicon Valley so to speak right here in the TCI – a techno pole!

Especially when you look at the regional youth unemployment rates today. We have to invest in the next generation to ensure we keep moving forward.

We must harness Opportunities To Run Through Our Communities.

And that includes also cutting down our energy bills by focusing on boosting our renewable energy sector through the technology available to us.

Right now Hawaii's clean energy goals are the most aggressive in the US. What does Hawaii have that we do ... the same natural resources – the sun, the sea, the wind and the land ...

We as One Caribbean need to be taking a page out of their books and adopt serious clean energy goals to not only help our environment but be good for our bottom line by attracting manufacturing interests to our shores.

Let's face it – the energy cost from oil in the Caribbean is astronomical. We have the resources to move away from that and towards a Clean Energy Initiative by 2045 - harnessing our god given natural assets to better serve our people.

This will also deliver a serious boost to our economies by helping to set us apart from our neighbors and the world... but we have to be aggressive with this and not continue to lounge around contently being oil dependent...

CLOSING

We as Caribbean leaders must create a new direction for our people in order to meet the economic challenges of our time ... To restore growth to our countries and region and opportunity to our people.

To empower our people so they can take responsibility for their own lives - so we as one Caribbean can also take our place in the world as an economic giant like India and our Latin American brothers and sisters.

We Can Do It ... but we must move forward on the road to growth and prosperity - embracing technology, new ideas and matching world business standards.

Of course the journey will be hard and the climb steep ...

We have been told too long that we cannot do this by a course of cynics...

But ladies and gentlemen I have no hesitation in saying it anywhere - again and again in the Jamaican parlance, "We Lickle But We Tallawah!"

We are strong in our culture, our creativity, our talent

And we are rich in our resources and diversity.

We already have all the tools we need to compete globally...

Now all we have to do is be more aggressive in competing for our wallet share.

And like my African friend tells me all the time – Caribbean people have to recognize the elephant we have on our heads and stop looking down at the crickets at our feet.

Because this globalization of which we speak so often is here to stay - and like Usain Bolt - we must be ready to compete on the global track of the world market place.

So I challenge you this morning - let us proactively strive to work together towards the collective vision of moving this country, this economy and this Caribbean region forward.

Let us combine our visions and our energies so we can see a little further down the road and around the corner

So we can use that vision to challenge the status quo and

And most of all - use that vision to innovate with outside the box strategies so we can grow, expand and excel... in this country and as One Caribbean region!

Thank you so very much

Congratulations to the organizers of this important conference.

And I look forward to your questions and comments!