

**UNCOMFORTABLE: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP SUSTAINABILITY**  
Caribbean Canada Emerging Leaders Dialogues (CCELD): Group B

**OVERVIEW**

Having come together from many different countries, Eliane Ubaliljoro challenged the 2019 CCELD leaders to “get comfortable with being uncomfortable.” This advice ultimately guided much of our personal growth as we undertook our experiential tours, this research paper, and new ways of considering the concepts of leadership and sustainability.

Group B is made up of 13 leaders: 5 men, 7 women. This includes 3 Canadians, 3 Bahamians, 3 Jamaicans, 1 Bajan, 1 Kittisan, 1 Filipino and 1 BV Islander, each with unique backgrounds, leadership styles, customs and cultures.

**CONTEXT**

Sustainability is commonly defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (IISD, 2019). While we have seen significant economic growth on a global scale over the past two decades, there is corresponding concern amongst leaders that secondary outcomes, such as wealth discrepancy and natural resource diminution threaten the long-term viability of these gains.

Within this unbalanced context, the practice of sustainable leadership has emerged as a critical function. Seeking out and driving the skills and attributes that will prepare organizations for the future can be messy, murky and uncomfortable. In many cases it disrupts our habits, our ego, our status quo, and what we feel we understand about ourselves and the world around us. Those who are able to rise to meet this discomfort head on and find a better way forward for their organizations are leaders with vision and perseverance.

**CCELD PERSPECTIVES**

Through a rich variety of contexts and shared experiences, we learned that the practice of sustainable leadership involves a commitment to addressing and overcoming uncomfortable systemic constraints. Principally these included timelines, funding, governance, and engagement. We were fortunate to be exposed to a number of inspiring ways to move past these challenges through acts of sustainable leadership.

- Timelines

In the mountains, we met a female farmer managing 2000 acres of land (animals, fruit trees, coffee), the sole source of employment in her rural community. Her challenge to organizational sustainability was **time**.

Armed with practical experience and an openness to trial and error, this farmer has successfully sustained her family's business but is facing an uncomfortable and uncertain future if she is not able to adapt her business model. The realities of sole proprietorship and tending to animals around the clock are physically taxing, and mean that there are only a few moments each day where she is able to turn her attention to the future. Nevertheless, she has found the space to incorporate some technology and articulate her company's values and vision on her website, which connect her with a loyal local following.

- Funding

Access to the resources necessary to effectively drive sustainable leadership can be a challenge in developing countries. We saw many examples where the preservation and promotion of art and culture in society is challenged by **funding**.

In the context of sustainable leadership, this has introduced a tenuous balance between corporate support and freedom of expression, as well as what constitutes adequate preservation of a nation's history and culture. Provided they adhere to leaders' moral standards and vision, there is great potential in public, private and international partnerships. In terms of government support, being able to articulate the value of an initiative, both now and in the future, is a critical skill for sustainable leaders to secure the future of their organizations.

- Governance

Complexities and shortcomings in what we are officially allowed to do in a country can be a major barrier to progress, but we should not let it limit our aspirations. A leader's ability to move within, overcome and influence **governance** – bureaucracy, legislation, policies – is often necessary to correct what is wrong about the present and move forward in a better way. This brings to light issues such as corruption, apathy and cronyism, among others.

Although climate change can be difficult to articulate, and is not entrenched in many countries' current laws and policies, one Ministry leader demonstrated how frameworks from the international stage (e.g. UNFCCC), deference to intelligently applied data, and tenacity at the local level can begin to shift government decision-making, and will eventually impact its governance.

- Engagement

The challenge of succession planning is faced by the Rastafari, who we met just beyond the Montego Bay River. After overcoming persecution and many discomforts over the years through adherence to their core values, **engagement** was their current challenge.

As the Rastafari culture emphasizes finding your personal path, generational succession cannot be relied upon to sustain the community. Instead, the Rastafari nurture youth engagement through their openness to accepting new technologies in their community, including high speed

internet. Seeing the wider world as an opportunity rather than a threat after so much persecution was a powerful example of sustainable leadership.

Conversations about marijuana are also uncharted territory for many. One leader we met has engaged thousands of youth, medical professionals and industry experts in recent years on the facts and potential around pharmaceutical cannabis. Using education and a strong adherence to her vision to persist through misinformation and bureaucratic red tape, her passionate engagement has been key to opening people up to new possibilities, and sustaining longevity.

## **CONCLUSION AND ALUMNI COMMITMENT**

For leaders, addressing gaps in an organization's sustainability is often personally and professionally challenging. Leaders must bring together a complex array of skills, not all of which will come easily to them. Openness, humility, self-awareness, and holding space for others as much as yourself can be deeply uncomfortable. Despite this, we learned this week how vital this is for sustainability.

As members of CCELD2019 we have been exposed to new truths about ourselves, and the possibilities that lie in change. We intend to continue these dialogues through promotion and engagement, particularly via our social media presences. We are committed to embodying all that we have learned about sustainable leadership, applying it in our professional lives, nurturing it in others, and to continuing to build (and fail) forward toward a sustainable future.

**Final Word Count:** (excludes titles and citations): 978

## **References:**

International Institute for Sustainable Development. (2019). *Sustainable Development*. Retrieved from <https://www.iisd.org/topic/sustainable-development>

## **Annex A – Group B Members**

- Asline Blanc – Bahamas
- Shannon Bradey – Canada
- Maria Burke – Jamaica
- Ian Forrest – Jamaica
- Jeremy Jones - Barbados
- Jonathan Lobo – Canada
- Gervasina Martin – British Virgin Islands
- Dennis Mc Call Jr – St. Kitts-Nevis
- Kerry-Ann McPherson – Jamaica
- Anastarcia Palacios – Bahamas
- Kavonne Thurston – Bahamas
- Denise Williams – Canada
- Matthew Yngson – Philippines