



Office of
the Prime Minister

**A POLICY LECTURE TO THE GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF THE BAHAMAS AS PART OF THE
'MEET THE POLICY-MAKERS LECTURE SERIES'**

THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE BAHAMAS

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COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Honoured and Distinguished Guests....

Ladies and Gentlemen....

Good Evening!

In this 49th year of celebration of our nation as a fully independent, Commonwealth of The Bahamas, I hope that each of you has found many reasons to affirm and proclaim, why you are 'Proud to be a Bahamian'.

Pride is not normally a concept which I champion in myself.

But when it is contrasted with the idea of 'humility', I believe it to be an essential trait in those of us who aspire to 'Servant-Leadership'.

But the sense of national pride which we have been promoting in this year's Independence celebrations, instead speaks to the sense of dignity, self-worth and achievement that we have attained in the 49 years since the birth of our nation.

And, as we witnessed in the Cultural Show on Clifford Park on Saturday night, despite all the challenges past and present, as Bahamians, we have so much to be proud of.

I take special pride, and great pleasure, in being invited to deliver this lecture this evening. The institution of the University of The Bahamas was an essential part of the dream and promise of Independence: created to be home to a flourishing of ideas, and host to vigorous and rigorous debate.

I am grateful, therefore, for the invitation and the opportunity to share my thoughts on 'The National Development Plan for The Bahamas'.

The lectures which I enjoy most, both enlighten and provoke.

And so I'm looking forward to the discussion afterwards, which will surely indicate whether I have succeeded in delivering either.

In thinking about how to address the subject, I first considered the most direct approach. I thought to reflect on the findings of the 'National Development Plan' to date, and set out some of the priorities of our administration in completing and implementing them. But this would have been enlightenment without provocation. The provocation, or rather, the things upon which we might not all agree, will hopefully prove more fertile for discussion and debate.

2. THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT ISN'T

The National Development Plan for The Bahamas, or indeed for any nation, is not static. It is a dynamic document, essentially detailing the myriad challenges and opportunities for the country.

It's perhaps best understood in the negative.

Without a National Development Plan, the government of the day has to make decisions and choices, most of which are based on short-term needs.

Given our 5-year electoral cycle, it is easy to spend money on visible outcomes which might be sufficiently impressive to inspire a few votes.

But the money might be better spent on less visible outcomes, such as improving coastal defences, which would prevent long-term coastal erosion.

Without a Plan, governments would also have to start every initiative from scratch, obtaining basic data, formulating options, and consulting the public before determining a course of action.

Any rigorous planning exercise, done properly and well, helps to ensure success.

It does not guarantee it, but without a plan, success is likely to be far more elusive.

The National Development Plan for The Bahamas benefitted by having input from Bahamians from each part of the country, and every walk of life.

The results therefore form a consensus of what Bahamians think needs to be done in order to move the country forward.

The data contained in the plan, and the recommendations built upon it, are refined into a number of specific, tangible goals, with strategies attached on how to deliver them.

The advantage of this is that we are able to understand what success looks like.

That said, it is not the specific step-by-step planning document which some imagine it to be. The government of day would still need to detail substantive policy and a delivery plan, in order to make it effective.

In other words, each administration still has a responsibility in determining 'how' specific goals are to be delivered.

This takes us back to the 'Choices' and 'Priorities' of individual administrations.

And this is where vast differences of approach can and will emerge.

As we move forward, perhaps political debate might be structured around key focal points of the plan.

For example, as the plan calls for the provision of 'adequate funding for education', political parties could be challenged to say what they think constitutes 'adequate funding', how it will be sourced, and how it would be spent.

3. CONTEXT IS KING

My earlier point about the dynamic nature of development planning, was to hint at more than the evolving needs of our country over the short, medium and long terms.

The 'context' becomes 'king', insofar as the realities of the day will have great influence on the priorities and perceptions of the time.

Whatever those are, it is also to emphasise that the context didn't come out of nothing.

We do not start with a blank sheet, and on it sketch out our version of paradise.

No – we have to start with what we have inherited from previous administrations and previous generations.

Even though they may not have used the language of national development, their decisions and actions continue to shape our present reality.

And the influence is not merely historical.

There are Bahamians today who still hold dear some version of earlier ideas of national development.

Are they wrong to do so?

Of course not: they are Bahamians.

And even if they are not the view of the majority, they still have influence.

So let us first consider the pre-Independence period, the 20th century up until 1967.

We often describe the period in racial terms, focusing on the divide between the ruling white minority and the black majority.

But the form of legalised racial oppression that existed, the Bahamian version of 'apartheid' in South Africa, were supported by an economic system that did all that it could to protect the interests of the minority.

In turn, the national development goals and strategies of the day were to stoutly defend and maintain the status quo.

Education, health and economic opportunities were concentrated on the minority, and the economy and the society were structured around those so privileged.

One of the most lethal weapons for oppression is the deprivation of education; and so education for The Majority stopped shortly after primary school.

Healthcare was not universal, nor was the right to vote.

As was widely reported at the time, particularly by foreign newspapers like the Miami Herald in the 1960s, corruption and conflicts of interest among politicians were endemic.

The public treasury was used as a bank for private interests.

And The Islands of The Bahamas were ruled by a Kleptocracy, whereby land and other natural resources were granted to and exploited for the benefit of the ruling class.

That initial parcelling out of our natural resources, means that those who benefitted from it were given an enormous head-start, in terms of the ability to accumulate capital and wealth.

Today we can easily see how that generational wealth has conferred economic security upon those families.

This is what enabled the infrastructural interests and holdings they have accrued since.

Hopefully none of this is surprising to anyone.

But I mention it because that vision of national development was the structure and foundation inherited by the newly-independent Bahamas in 1973.

This was the context inherited by Sir Lynden Pindling and his colleagues.

Their approach to national development is captured in the title Dr. Doris Johnson chose for her book: 'The Quiet Revolution'.

'Quiet' because Pindling wanted to ensure that the minority wealth-holders didn't flee the country, possibly causing the economy to collapse; and 'Revolution' because he also wanted to achieve what the dictionary defines as 'a forcible overthrow of a social order'.

From 1967 to 1992, and especially after Independence in 1973, the speed and extent of the changes of those years was immense.

Up until now, it remains the most transformational time in our post-Independence era.

If you want to see a tangible expression of those changes, have a look at the Yellow Pages from 1967 to 1975.

Look at the faces of the professionals advertising there.

When you survey the ads for doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers and so on, it is striking how the racial and national profile changes.

Striking also to note the expansion in the numbers of qualified, Bahamian professionals – the new middle class.

Apart from the social transformation, the hallmarks of this period were the creation of the foundational institutions and structures of our modern Bahamas: the Central Bank; the Royal Bahamas Defence Force; the National Insurance Scheme; compulsory education through to high school for all; and of course, the founding of the College – now, University – of The Bahamas.

With the majority now able to be properly-educated, and given access to the jobs and careers that had been previously denied, a new middle-class emerged, one largely composed of members of the racial majority, keen to build homes and businesses and create wealth for themselves and future generations.

But with the o-li-gar-chi-cal order left intact, it was perhaps foreseeable that an economic ‘glass ceiling’ would tacitly remain.

Despite the unquestionable achievements of the Pindling era, I see two forces at play which undermined progress.

Education gave thousands of Bahamians new paths to self-empowerment and opportunity. But the economy was not sufficiently expanded and diversified in order to accommodate them.

After the initial burst of middle-class success, educated Bahamians were later encouraged to become ‘job-seekers’, rather than people with high ambitions to pursue careers and create wealth.

With access to the big sectors of the economy still largely remaining in the hands of the few, over time, frustration and cynicism has grown among the many.

In the context of where we find ourselves today, I see strong similarities between the desire for fundamental transformational change that existed then, and the present desire for fundamental transformational change that exists now.

Our context derives from the legacy of that time.

I shall return to this point later.

Suffice to say, we can fairly characterise the plan for national development during the Pindling years, as the implementation of 'The Quiet Revolution'.

With the first change of government since Independence taking place in 1992, national development thereafter featured a more managerial approach.

The status quo was largely left intact.

A quick glance at some of the biggest initiatives of that time, reflect an ideological shift which removed certain economic protections for Bahamians that had been implemented during the Pindling years.

The repeal of the Immovable Property Act, the privatisation of BTC, the monopolisation of the port of entry - the Arawak port - and the extensive roadworks initiatives, all allowed private interests to profit magnificently from government institutions.

Other social initiatives, such as the liberalisation of the radio airwaves, introduced similar ostensibly 'free-market' changes.

This proliferation of media, and especially the radio call-in format, was the early version of the social media landscape on which we live today.

While the language of the time was about the virtues of capitalism and so on, in fact public money was used to subsidise many of these projects, and create protections against competition and other market forces.

And so we see that the priorities of national development shifted once-again.

Privatisation did not change the basic economic model, and instead shifted the emphasis to the promotion and protection of established economic interests.

Notwithstanding the stated goal of having the expanded wealth of 'trickle down' to the wider society, it is not clear that there was in fact, any beneficial 'trickle-down' effect.

But it meant that those who already had significant capital, or those who were already able to raise investment and loans, did very well.

The 'shareholder society', as envisioned, never materialised, instead manifesting growing disparities in income.

The Christie years, interspersed with the Ingraham years, shifted the focus back to a national development agenda, with a more centrist blend of the approaches of Pindling and Ingraham.

Big, bold initiatives like Anchor Projects, BAMSI, Urban Renewal, and National Health Insurance sought to extend the agenda of the Quiet Revolution.

The doubling of investment in education also signalled a return to Pindling's ideological roots.

And of course, the launch of a formal 'National Development Plan' shifted the idea of governance and planning into something far more structured, stable, and long-term.

But the basic economic model unchanged, with the focus on high-volume rather than high-value tourism,

I suspect that the encouragement of large-scale, foreign direct investments into ventures like BahaMar and Atlantis, probably peaked in the Ingraham then Christie years.

And so we come to the more recent years.

In many ways its far too soon to tell what its ultimate legacy will be.

I wouldn't want this lecture to stray into some of the current political battles, but I struggle to see any positive impact on national development since 2017.

Before Dorian, and before Covid, it appeared that the approach to the economy was that of the small business-owner, where so-called 'balancing-the-books' was the holy grail of governance, with other goals for the nation barely articulated, and certainly not prioritised. We also see signs of systematic efforts to hand over many ordinary functions of the state, to the private sector.

Although obscured by the lack of transparency exercised by a single man during the rule by Emergency Orders, the scale of the exercise recalls pre-1967, where extremely narrow economic interests were prioritised and favoured over others.

4. THE DAVIS ADMINISTRATION: VALUES, CONTEXT & PRIORITIES

And so we come to the present.

History and hindsight are great teachers, so I expect that one day in the future, one of my successors will stand here and tell you what to make of our successes or otherwise.

But in terms of our intent, in terms of our own approach to implementing a plan for national development, I will speak to three elements:

The Context which we have inherited;

The Values which form the prism through which we will address the elements;

And the Priorities which are guiding our administration.

The Context

Firstly, the **Context**.

Post-Dorian and Post-Covid, both The Bahamas and the world have changed substantially. As with every government, we need to address the overwhelmingly urgent and important short-term issues, while setting the country on a sustainable path to fulfil a long-term vision.

If you haven't already done so, please be sure to read our campaign platform document, 'A Blueprint for Change'.

I know that in the past, many have viewed these documents as a campaign exercise.

But we are serious about delivering.

Indeed many initiatives are already underway, and have been fulfilled.

In our 'Blueprint' you will find a substantial number of policies to 'Recover, Rebuild and Revolutionize' our Bahamas.

Since 2016, when the research and findings of the formal National Development Plan were being collated, we were still paying insufficient attention to what the impact of Climate Change might be.

Dorian is the storm that persuaded even the sceptics that climate change was not a problem of a distant future, but one we must confront right now.

Then the Covid-19 pandemic led to both a health and an economic crisis.

The global aftershocks in terms of rising costs, soaring inflation, and restricted supply chains, all made worse by the war in Ukraine, are likely to remain challenging for a while yet.

Our Values

If these provide the facts provide the context for a national development plan, the answers to the question ‘what should we do?’, then our **Values** will guide us as to ‘how to do it’.

Since becoming Party Leader in 2017, I have spoken on a number of occasions, in parliament and elsewhere, about the values which guide us.

We first think of the concept of ‘The Promise of Independence’.

I articulated this in parliament in 2020, during my Budget Contribution, when I said:

“The promise of Independence was more than just freedom from colonial rule. It was also the promise of self-determination, the right to lead lives of dignity and purpose. It was the promise of unlocking, for the first time, real economic opportunity for the majority of the people of The Bahamas. Every generation needs to fight anew to make these promises real.”

The second set of Values rest on the principles of ‘Economic Justice’ and ‘Economic Dignity’. ‘Economic Justice’ is based on the simple but profound idea that an economy will be more successful, if it is fairer.

It seeks to redress some of the inequalities created by capitalism.

By giving everyone a chance to earn a fair, decent income, everyone will prosper.

What does this mean in practice?

We will work to make the system of taxation fairer.

We will work towards ensuring that workers earn not just a minimum wage, but a liveable wage.

Complete economic equality is an unrealistic goal.

What is achievable, however, and morally compelling, is to protect that which I believe to be the common denominator of humanity: the joy of life itself.

We will ensure that public investment in education, housing, transportation and so on, benefit the many, and not the few.

For example, you can see how, in just 9 months, we have broader access to housing a priority

This contrasts with the approach of the previous administration, which was to provide land for those who already have some financial success behind them.

The concept of 'Economic Dignity' is closely related to the approach of 'Economic Justice'. And I fully support the Three Pillars which have been identified as essential by Gene Sperling, who originally coined the term.

Firstly, the capacity to care for family and experience its greatest joys. My understanding of family in this sense goes wider than those to whom we are related by blood.

Secondly, the pursuit of 'Potential' and 'Purpose'.

My own life experience has shown time and again, that when people have the opportunity to pursue their potential and purpose, even if they need second, third or even fourth chances to do so, they are better for it.

This thinking informs our approach to education and training of course, but also, to provide another example, undergirds our approach to the prevention for example, to the prevention of crime and the administration of justice.

Rather than just engage in punitive policing, we see early interventions and active rehabilitation as part of the solution.

The third pillar proposes 'Economic participation without domination and humiliation'.

Even without engaging the extremes of child and slave labour, we are all too familiar with some working practices in The Bahamas, where workers are subjected to all manner of humiliating indignities.

And the employers who practice it, are often amazed at the poor morale and lack of motivation in their businesses.

Along with the 'Promise of Independence', and the concepts of 'Economic Justice' and 'Economic Dignity', our final set of animating Values go to our view of the proper role and function of the state.

As an unashamed holder of progressive values, I do not believe that the state should stand idly by, and leave people to just fend for themselves.

At the other extreme, I do not believe that the state is there to do everything; people must and should be able to help themselves.

Taken together, I believe that these 'Values' will keep us on the path which Bahamians elected us to pursue:-

To move closer to fulfilling the ambition and promise of independence;

To put people first by ensuring that economic activity is not just a series of metrics, but instead driven by the very human needs for dignity and justice;

And to ensure that the state, in its drive for efficiency and effectiveness, in an emergency does not lose its ability to also act as a Good Samaritan.

And just to be clear:

Preceding administrations embraced these values to some extent.

Post-Independence, they certainly all did, to some degree, although the most recent administration hopefully represented the lowest point of the commitment.

But where I do draw a distinction is in the formal incorporation of these values into policy.

We can and will test what we do against these Values.

We will do all that we can to succeed.

And if we do, it is the Bahamian people who will benefit.

Our Priorities

Earlier I referred to our 'Blueprint for Change', highlighting our compendium of policy initiatives.

It is ambitious in scope and in depth.

As a matter of practical reality, we need to prioritise.

It cannot all happen at once

Yes, there's an argument for saying everything needs to be done, but without a sense of focus, without a sense of priorities, we'll spread ourselves too thinly, and end up achieving nothing.

Across these 9 months in office, we have set out our priorities in a number of policy speeches, both here and abroad.

In our Swearing-In speeches and the 'Speech from the Throne', we detailed our broad legislative programme.

In my remarks to the United Nations, and at COP26 in Glasgow, I positioned our foreign policy in terms of Climate Change, and challenged the international community to deliver on the promises they have made.

And so our priorities are inter-dependent, and not mutually exclusive

Firstly, **Education.**

I spoke earlier about the deprivation of education as an instrument of oppression.

But a more positive way to say that is, that education is the path to empowerment and prosperity.

This has been true of my own personal journey, and that of countless others.

What is distinctive about our approach?

Well, we will educate not just for the broad curriculum, but also to ensure that Bahamians can take advantage of the opportunities we are seeking to stimulate in the Orange, Green and Blue Economies.

So, for example, our support for the 'LJM Maritime Academy' reflects this, along with the launch of a new 'School for the Creative and Performing Arts'.

That said, we also recognise that our cultural norms do not currently support and promote the value of education as they once did.

This has given rise to comments such as 'book learning isn't everything'.

And while I agree that the traditional, university-based education is not the right path for everyone, a confident grounding in literacy, numeracy and all the other skills which enable someone to function well in modern society – these skills remain essential.

The grammar of Whatsapp messages, and the attitude of Tik Tok videos are not reliable foundations for success.

And education isn't something that should just happen to young people in schools. It should be a cradle-to-grave experience, an exercise lifelong learning.

In the short term, we must address the learning loss of the past few years, occasioned by the pandemic.

But as we move towards the medium and long-term, we will push to improve the standing of training, learning and education in our communities.

We also need to improve our educational attainment levels.

Over the years, a system has evolved whereby those people of means, pay for their children's education, either here or abroad.

I am deeply concerned that those who cannot afford to pay, too often do not receive the kind of education that can help them fulfil their Potential and Purpose.

Our second Priority is in **Health & Wellness**.

Access to good, affordable, reliable healthcare sits within our ideas about economic justice and dignity.

Plans are well-advanced to build new clinics and hospitals.

But we have a bigger ambition.

The recruitment of more doctors and nurses and staff, who can give patients the care they need.

Strengthening National Health Insurance to ensure that Bahamians can access that care.

And support for wellness initiatives that should help to prevent people needing to seek medical attention in the first place.

As we transition to achieve these goals, we have put in stop-gap measures, reserving \$10 million in this year's budget, to cover the costs of catastrophic healthcare.

The **Economy** is our third Priority.

It is not to say that it's the third most important thing for us.

In fact, most National Development Plans build out from economic policy.

But I use this order to underscore the point that for my administration, we are mindful to put the individual needs of Education and Health, on par with the need to have a successful Economy.

We believe that fiscal soundness derives from strong economic growth.

And by the way, our efforts to diversify economy do not mean that we are playing down tourism in any way.

It remains our most valuable sector, and we think that the potential for growth and value for tourism, is still significant.

I have already spoken as to how the principles of Economic Justice and Dignity informs our approach to the National Development Plan.

Matters connected to the Environment are our fourth Priority.

By this, I mean both the natural and built environment.

Perhaps a better way to describe it, would be the way we plan to look after our home: whether it's God-given or we've made it ourselves.

You have already heard the attention and focus we are giving to the impact of Climate Change on The Bahamas.

You will continue to hear more.

Looking ahead, we may have to engage with some very challenging natural events and conditions.

Without wishing to veer into something too bleak for this occasion, please understand, that when we say that the impact of climate change poses an existential threat to our country, we mean just that: it threatens our very existence.

And we can, and will and must do something about it.

The fifth Priority is what we can broadly term 'Cultural and Social'.

I'm not talking about formal culture, in the sense of the arts, but culture as in 'the way we do things here'.

I am not alone in thinking that we can do more to build stronger communities and a stronger nation.

(A national leader should not say "We are not a happy people")

The conversations and images on social media too often represent us as a violent, conflict-driven people.

In our own lives, we know many wonderful Bahamians who do so much to strengthen the ties that bind us. The nurse who stays past her shift to care for a patient who needs her. The teacher who goes the extra mile for a student who is struggling. The grandmother who looks out for the children on her street who might be short on meals or affection. The pastor who knows who in his flock needs extra healing.

We shouldn't have a conversation about our national development without acknowledging that the work done by the angels among us should be supported, lifted up, and encouraged. That is the only way to ensure that we will have such angels in every generation.

During the celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of Independence next year, I hope that we can include this as part of our national conversation.

What do we need to do to make sure that we are developing into the kind of people and society that we want to be?

5. GOVERNANCE

This takes me to the final points I wish to make tonight, which relate to Governance.

We've already considered the limits and possibilities of a National Development Plan, and reviewed the approaches of previous administrations that have resulted into our present context.

I've set out the ideological approach of our Administration – did I mention that it's a New Day? – I've set out the ideological approach through an iteration of the Values that guide us. And I've highlighted how our policy priorities, detailed in our 'Blueprint For Change', show how we will approach the short, medium and long-term needs of national development.

Before I finish, I wish to address some issue of governance, which I think will act as a brake on national development, unless we resolve them.

Principal among these is the issue of Trust.

We are at a stage in history, where there is very little trust between the people and the government.

This is true not just of us here in The Bahamas, but we can do something about it here.

In our view, the lack of Trust has arisen because of a lack of Transparency, a lack of Accountability, and a lack of Delivery.

We have already taken steps and will continue to take steps to improve on each one.

Our weekly press conferences, statements and video news reels, are all produced in an attempt to keep the Bahamian people informed about what we are doing.

We have also improved media access to ministers, so that ministers can give thoughtful answers to questions.

Even though it is still early days, we expect to be held accountable for our decisions and actions.

And we hope and expect that everyone in political life shares the same willingness to be held accountable.

It is a key component in building trust.

In fact, lack of accountability especially undermines trust and confidence in government.

When people see politicians transgressing, but with no apparent consequences, it's bad for democracy.

We are determined to turn things around.

Along with Trust and Accountability, we believe that when we truly deliver for the Bahamian people, when we make real the promises on which they gave us their vote, then Trust can truly be rebuilt.

We will not succeed at everything we do.

And everything we do will not produce the benefits we anticipated.

But we will continue to try, and are confident that we will have more successes than not.

But none of it will work unless we work in partnership with the Bahamian people, Even though the country is crying out for change, it is often the case that people want change, but don't like to be changed.

But if we work together, if every section of society is prepared to work together, that 'common, loftier goal' can come well within our reach.

But it requires us to do more than just offer knee-jerk reactions to everyday events.

Businesses and centres of learning must play their part.

Churches and civic organisations can and should actively support national development.

And the members of the press, who play such a valuable role in communicating information and shaping opinion, I encourage to also reach higher.

National development needs us all to pull together, for the betterment of everyone.

By working in partnership, we can spend the next 50 years building the kind of Bahamas that each of us knows in our hearts, is 'Better'.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention tonight.

I hope that you feel enlightened and provoked.

God Bless you all.

END