

April 30th 2021

GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

Introduction

The policies of this Unity Labour Party administration have, over and over again, proven to be necessary, relevant, timely and forward looking when assessed by their overall impacts on the lives of Vincen-tians. The way they coordinate to address the many aspects of na-tional development, emphasising the fact that a piece-meal approach to policy development can never work for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like ours. The eruption of the La Soufriere volcano has revealed in unambiguous terms the practical benefits of a number of government policies on resilience building. What has been displayed within recent weeks are for example, the foreign policy, education policy, infrastructure policy, fiscal policy, health policy, and how they provide guidance through these extremely challenging times. The im-pact of these and other policies of the ULP administration has moved from the abstract for those who previously never took the time to assess their significance, to being real and practical measures that our people can now depend on and benefit from. The article this week would examine briefly some of the policies of the government and their coordinated contribution to resilience building, displayed in very practical terms during the eruption of La Soufriere.

Foreign Policy

Even before the explosive eruption phase of La Soufriere, there was constant monitoring of the volcano's effusive eruption by the Seismic Research Centre of the University of the West Indies (UWISRC). This regional body is one that this country supports and depend on for the services it provides. The significance of ensuring the financial viability of the UWISRC was discussed during the last budget debate and a fiscal measure of a 1% point increase of the Customs Service Charge was introduced to fund this and other regional organisations. The Opposition New Democratic Party vehemently opposed this measure, resorting to mischaracterisation, deception and flat out lies about the nature and impact of this measure, choosing to play politics, in its quest for political mileage. Imagine where this country and it's almost 20,000 displaced residents from the red and orange zones, in the north would have been without the expertise of the UWISRC team that provided timely updates and warnings.

In a matter of hours, messages of solidarity, followed by pledges and tangible assistance started flowing from the regional and international community. Boat loads of emergency supplies, water, food, water storage tanks, protective gear, were sent from counties in the region to the government as well as other Non-Governmental Organisations in support of our emergency response. The international system was mobilise, as the United Nations and its partners immediately put systems in place including sending a team on the ground comprising representatives from UNDP and the WFP, while at the same

time organising a pledging facility to which member states can contribute. It would not be far-fetched to associate the two years SVG has spent as the Vice President (in the first instance) and President of the United Nation's Economic and Social Council, and our current membership of the United Nations Security Council, to the way the world has responded. This country's foreign policy continues to contribute to national development and our continued efforts at building resilience.

Infrastructure in Education

For the purpose of this discussion, infrastructure development and education are twined as the focus is on the development of this country's education infrastructure. Over the 20 years of governance by the ULP, this country has had the construction of 10 state of the art schools from Union Island in the Grenadines to Peter's Hope in the North West and Georgetown in the North East. There has also been the rehabilitation of a number of other plants across the country to accommodate our country's progressive education revolution. This development has offered much better temporary facilities for evacuees, as the schools are being used as shelters to provide short-term accommodation for thousands of families. Many schools now have classrooms as opposed to open halls, where individual families can be offered a space and with upgraded kitchen facilities, more can be done on-site to make the accommodation more seamless. The renovation of many schools to replace "fancy blocks" and wire mesh (used

in older buildings to improve ventilation) can now be appreciated as residents throughout this country continue to deal with the problem of the ash that remains on the ground. Better school buildings have created more comfortable emergency shelters, putting this country in a better position to address the evacuation challenges that arose as a result of La Soufriere.

Health Care, Pandemic and Volcanic Eruption

The possibility of an outbreak of Covid-19 in the emergency shelters as a result of the gathering of families and individuals from different communities was and continues to be a real concern to health officials. So far however, the number of positive cases coming out of the shelters have not shown a spike or any significant increase in cases. This is due largely in part to the aggressive education campaign carried out by the Health Services Sub-committee on Covid-19 and preparation for evacuation. The investment of the government in healthcare, hiring additional nurses, investing in testing as well as vaccines have all contributed in preventing the additional challenge of a spike in Covid-19 cases in emergency shelters. The government continues to be vigilant with testing and monitoring at the shelters and the evacuees play their part in adhering to the protocols outlined by the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment.

Conclusion

Building resilience involves improving the ability of this country to cope with disasters in a way that minimises loss and damage and our ability to recover quickly. This country's foreign policy, health, education, infrastructure and fiscal policies, in concert have been developed and implemented to achieve this objective, enabling us to keep things together with assistance from the regional and international community. It is often said that we are a resilient people. The truth in this statement lies not only in our individual strengths to rebound, but in the collective preparation of this country through government's policy to cope with and recover from disasters.