



FROM ANANSI TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION



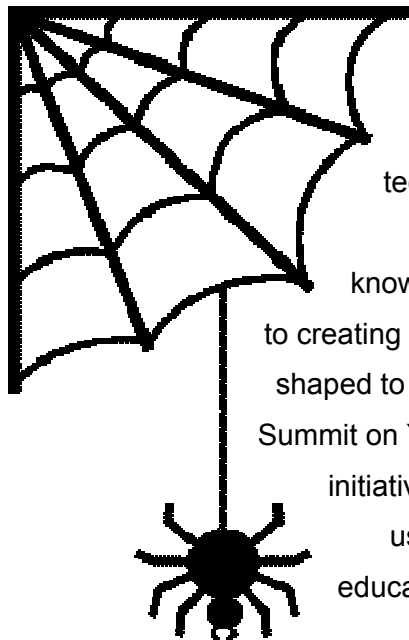
**By Riane de Haas-Bledoeg
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November 11, 2010 - Culture can be considered an effective tool for regional integration. In the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), culture is seen as critical in the promotion of a sense of regional identity or “Caribbean-ness”. This idea of regional identity has its merits as the Caribbean is known for its rich cultural diversity which distinguishes us as a people internationally in areas such as the literary arts, music, dance, art and craft, and the many world-renowned music festivals and other events. Acknowledging that cultural diversity is a driving force for development, CARICOM has sought to develop cultural industries which promote the rich and diverse traditions of our many peoples while safeguarding cultural heritage in the region.

Central to the development of cultural industries and the maximization of its contribution to the economy will be the creation of opportunities for optimal creative development, especially in the younger Caribbean population. Though held periodically, the Caribbean Festival of Arts (CARIFESTA) is seen as the main vehicle for the development of these cultural industries. CARIFESTA, which is regional, roving, multidisciplinary mega arts festival, is profiled as promoting intercultural dialogue and to present and showcase the cultural diversity of the region.

Cultural industries in CARICOM though, are challenged by lack of incentives, insufficient training opportunities, high tariff and duties and inadequate financing support, among others. In October 2008, a Task Force was established following a mandate from the

Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) and the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) to facilitate the development of a Regional Development Strategy for the region's cultural industries. The Regional Strategy is expected to be presented by mid 2011. In the interim, and as part of its continued efforts to improve the quality of education in the region, CARICOM is also exploring partnerships for integrating digital technology into teaching and learning environments where students can achieve higher levels of literacy objectives. At the Twentieth Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) in Guyana in October 2010, Ministers and officials responsible for education gave special attention to the area of technological innovations in teaching and learning and were introduced to the use of animation as a medium of communication in the classroom.



Anansi

Acknowledging this need to improve ways of communication for transferring knowledge to the younger generation, CARICOM is realising the positive outcomes from “learning with fun” through the use of digital technology. Mandated by the Twelfth Special COHSOD on Children will be initiatives such as the CARICOM Kids Website which creates a virtual knowledge network for children of the Caribbean. This initiative will contribute to creating a mass movement of young people sensitized to regional integration and shaped to a Caribbean identity, to which Heads of Government at the 2010 Special Summit on Youth Development in Suriname have committed themselves to. Another initiative will focus on raising awareness in the Caribbean on the benefits of the use of animation in public education with special focus on cultural heritage education for children and youth. This project, “Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in the Caribbean Through the Use of Animation in Public Education”, will combine two worlds - Caribbean history and folklore with new media and digital technology – in a bid to preserve our cultural heritage and prepare the region for a new approach that will fully involve and benefit its young people.

A well-known symbol in Caribbean folklore, Anansi (Ah-NAN-see), will be key to this approach. Also known as Anancy, Kwaku Ananse, Nanzi or Ba Anansi, Anansi is a mischievous spider that often manifests himself as a man. Like other characters, for example Brer' Rabbit or the coyote in the United States, he is full of tricks and a symbol of skill and wisdom in speech. It is believed that Anansi stories originated in the Ashanti tribe in Ghana, West Africa, and through the Atlantic slave trade were brought to the

Caribbean. Through oral tradition in the African diaspora, Anansi tales remained popular from generation to generation. The stories are known throughout the various territories in the Caribbean, from Belize, Jamaica, Grenada, the Netherlands Antilles, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago to Guyana and Suriname. Symbolism in the Caribbean is also used for reflecting various norms and values. In many tales for instance, Anansi is the clever trickster but in some stories he becomes a victim of his own deception. Thus the underlying moral in most Anansi stories is that if you try to get the better of another person, that person might outwit you.

With fast developing technology and new modes of entertainment, it is felt that this form of our cultural heritage needs to be preserved in a way that will speak to the imagination and experience of children and youth in the region. The CARICOM project will therefore build on this concept of Anansi but in a way that speaks to the upcoming generations. This revival of Anansi therefore, against the background of the rich cultural diversity of the Caribbean, the appreciation for our own cultural heritage with its various symbols and heroes, will be a step made towards strengthening our Caribbean identity and should provide our younger generation with a greater sense of Caribbean-ness, of belonging, awareness and self-confidence.

Recently, consultations have been taking place with the Animaes Caribe Animation and Film and New Media Festival in Trinidad and Tobago and Toon Boom Animation Inc., of Canada to raise awareness on animation and technology in the region. The CARICOM Animation in Public Education project and the CARICOM Kids Website project will now build on work already started by Animaes Caribe with its Anansi Mission to promote Anansi as a Caribbean symbol. This initiative involves expertise from a wide range of fields from the creative disciplines as well as from areas such as education, sociology, history, children rights, intellectual property law and marketing. It will also include efforts to develop a network of specialists committed to and involved in initiatives towards the revival of Anansi as a symbol of our identity and heritage and as a consequence, contribute to regional integration. Links have also been established with animation and Anansi expertise in Ghana which will augment some of these initiatives in the Caribbean Diaspora. Efforts are now underway to mobilise financial and technical support for the implementation of these projects.

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