



Economic Letter October 2025



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The Caribbean Cultural Industries Provide Tangible Economic Benefits

In a media event on October 1 at Cricket West Indies' headquarters in Antigua, the top executives explained the financial challenge facing the company. In order to retain full membership of the International Cricket Council the West Indies are obliged to host Sri Lanka, New Zealand and Pakistan in the coming year, tours on which they are certain to make heavy losses. This comes after the current year when losses were incurred in hosting tours by Pakistan and Australia. Cricket West Indies last made a surplus in 2024, thanks to the Men's T20 World Cup. That profit has been used up in paying off prior debts and covering this year's losses.

The executives revealed that Cricket West Indies only makes money when it hosts England and India, because these matches attract large numbers of visitors. India and the US are the world's largest markets for cricket, and Indian tours are especially lucrative thanks to revenues from broadcasting rights in those countries. West Indies must now find a way to survive until the next Indian tour, scheduled for 2027, and to do so it has cut spending to the bone.

The Caribbean cultural Industries, broadly defined to include sports, are already a global success, boasting legendary names in cricket, athletics, music, literature, the plastic arts, theatre, dance and the festival arts. The iconic names in these fields are only the visible tip of the iceberg. There are tens of thousands of Caribbean people that make their livelihoods from cultural activities, including many with prowess in disciplines that are less well-known.

There is, however, a crucial difference with the Caribbean's dominant industry - tourism - that affects the domestic economic benefits from the cultural industries: tourists travel to local markets to consume accommodation, food and entertainment services, but it is the cultural practitioners who must travel to foreign markets to sell their services. For this reason the cultural industries have only a modest domestic economic footprint. Very little activity takes place locally, most income is generated abroad, and there is virtually nothing of the productive spillover to the local economy that tourism generates.

This is the dilemma which Cricket West Indies faces: it will realize a surplus only on those occasions when cricket becomes a tourist product. The Cricket West Indies executives recognize this and they hope to attract visitors from North America for the 2027 Indian tour to shore up their finances. It is much the same for other cultural products such as the Trinidad Carnival, Barbados' Cropover, St Lucia Jazz and the many music festivals that are a feature of the summer season in the Caribbean. There are considerable domestic economic benefits to be had from the cultural industries, but only on those occasions when culture becomes a tourist activity. In the Caribbean such events do not occur with sufficient frequency to provide a year-long source of employment for a significant proportion of the workforce.

We all celebrate the Caribbean's extraordinary achievements in literature, music, sports, theatre and dance, fashion and design, and in the new digital spaces. However, we are not always aware of the region's triumphs. The demise of Caribbean-wide media institutions, most recently Sportsmax and Loop News, leaves many of us unaware of happenings involving Caribbean people, in disciplines and countries other than our own, within the Caribbean and in the wider world. Filling this gap is perhaps a task for civil society organizations, and Caribbean people in the diaspora might be best placed to take up the mantle.

As far as government policies are concerned perhaps the most important boost that can be provided to the cultural industries is to make foreign currency freely available to cultural practitioners. Domestic limitations on the supply of foreign currency increase the incentive to relocate abroad. Concessions on the importation of specialized supplies and equipment are also helpful but more difficult to implement in practice. Financial support and promotion of local events and showcases is always going to be limited, in countries where basic government services such as health, education, public transportation and policing remain below an acceptable standard and where current tax revenues are already stretched. Financial support for culture cannot take precedence over the provision of essential public services and the maintenance and upgrade of public buildings, facilities and infrastructure.

The Caribbean cultural industries are a remarkable success story, but it is in the nature of this business that the Caribbean countries themselves see only a very small economic benefit. The cultural industries provide livelihoods for a stream of talented athletes, writers, designers, sports persons, commentators, promoters, communications and technology specialists, and other associated personnel, some who travel

frequently from a base in the region and many more who live abroad. However, Caribbean countries are too small to attract a constant stream of international activities that would make cultural tourism a major contribution to their GDP. Cricket West Indies may never have the financial muscle to develop and field a competitive international West Indies team but we should recognize and celebrate the employment opportunities which world markets have opened for Caribbean cricketers, including in the lucrative Indian Premier League.

My Economic Letters may be found under "[Commentary](#)" at DeLisleWorrell.com.