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Caribbean Community: Focus On Services Sector Development

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On April 6-8 in Kingston (Jamaica), government, private sector and non-governmental organization representatives participated in a workshop on services sponsored by the Caribbean Community (Caricom). World trade in services is estimated at US$600 billion per year, and accounts for two-thirds of GDP in the US and the European Community. The proportion for developing nations ranges between one-third and two-thirds. According to a draft "Profile of Caribbean Services," produced by the Caricom Secretariat with funding from the UN Development Programme (UNDP), services account for over 50% of GDP and employment in the Community's 13 member-nations. The draft notes that 110 students in medical sciences can now be trained simultaneously at the University of the West Indies (UWI). After two new schools come on stream in the near future, UWI capacity will increase to 175 students. With a pass-rate of over 90% at professional entry examinations in the US, and recognition of UWI medical degrees recognized in all Commonwealth countries, the university could attract students from outside Caricom. The report said other services regional governments and the private sector can focus on include health and cultural tourism, finance, and professional services, among others. Denis Lalor, president of the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica (PSOJ), told workshop participants on April 7 that services represent the most promising opportunity for economic growth in the Caribbean relative to agriculture and manufacturing. He added that if education services are upgraded, people of Caribbean origin living in North America would willingly send their children to school in the Caribbean. Thus far, only Dominica has mapped out a national strategy on services. A detailed study of the sector in Jamaica is expected to be completed this year. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 04/07/92)