

OPINION & INSIGHTS

AS I SEE IT



By Rahym R. Augustin-Joseph

Grenada's youth parliament: Worthy of emulation in Saint Lucia?



Members of Grenada's Youth Parliament (Photo Credit: PMO Grenada)

Grenada just showed us how a youth parliament should work, and Saint Lucia could learn a thing or two from it.

Too often, we treat young people like problems to fix rather than partners in progress. We harp on their mistakes but overlook the times they step up. Grenada's youth parliament was one of those moments—and it deserves way more attention.

What was so different?

Most youth parliaments in the region follow the same old script: young people fill parliamentary chambers and debate pre-picked topics, usually chosen by a small committee. It's symbolic, sure, but it lacks real democratic weight.

Grenada's model marked a significant departure. For the first time, youth parliamentarians were actually elected by their peers in each parish. No handpicking, just real representation. That shift turned the event from a role-playing exercise into something far more meaningful.

If Saint Lucia were to emulate this, young people in all 17 constituencies could offer themselves as Youth Parliamentary Representatives without party affiliations, elected by their peers in constituency-level youth polls. Such a move would enhance the credibility of their contributions and strengthen the democratic ethos of the youth parliament.

This is not to diminish the current practice of appointing youth parliamentarians, a process I have chaired in the past, but elections carry a distinct power. They cultivate responsibility, accountability and a sense of duty to constituents. Only through elections can youth parliamentarians truly say: "I have canvassed the views of my peers, and I represent them."

From simulation to legitimate policy space

With democratic legitimacy comes the potential to transform the idea of a youth parliament from a training simulation into a meaningful avenue for policymaking. Once youth representatives are elected, their constituencies become research and consultation bases. Their debates can reflect not just personal opinions, but the informed voices of young people from across the nation.

This also opens the door for youth parliaments to be used more actively by policymakers seeking input from young constituents. It enhances the value of youth parliaments as a democratic tool, not a tokenistic ritual.

Training: A necessary investment

Grenada didn't just hold elections. They prepped their candidates with training in campaigning, public speaking, and voter engagement. Saint Lucia should take that even further.

To make youth parliament a true force for advocacy, we need year-round training that covers:

- How our government actually works
- Community organising and mobilising
- Public speaking and debating skills
- Understanding laws, policies and key national issues

This isn't just about learning parliamentary jargon and rules—it's about giving young people the tools to make real contributions.

Strengthening the structure

For the youth parliament to be impactful, its duration and structure must evolve. A single sitting during Youth Month each year is inadequate. Instead, youth parliamentarians should serve for at least one year and participate in multiple sittings deliberating bills, offering policy critiques, and drafting proposals.

A youth parliament must be more than a theatrical exercise—it must influence public discourse and state policy.

To further this goal, there must also be differentiation in training depending on one's role—government or opposition. Shadow ministers, for instance, should receive training aligned with the ministry they represent. They should also be permitted to shadow their real-world counterparts.

The Junior Minister of Finance, for example, should have access to the Ministry of Finance to learn about revenue streams, debt servicing, budgeting processes, and fiscal policy. Similarly, the Shadow Attorney General should engage with legal professionals to understand legislation and litigation affecting the state.

Such experiences would deepen their understanding and ensure their contributions are not merely theoretical but grounded in institutional realities.

Creating space and support

Young people must also be allowed to reimagine governance. While it's tempting to replicate existing ministerial portfolios, youth parliamentarians should have the freedom to create structures that reflect their values and priorities. They must be supported with mentors, researchers and teams to help them craft well-informed contributions.

Support should also come in the form of media coverage. In 2020, the Youth Parliament Committee trained young people in media

reporting to cover the debates. This is a model that should be revived and institutionalised. On youth parliament days, media coverage should spotlight youth voices exclusively.

From debate to policy

Every sitting should culminate not just in a debate but in position papers and policy proposals. Policymakers must not merely claim to consider youth input; they must engage with it transparently, showing how youth perspectives have shaped final decisions.

A regional gap

One cannot ignore the broader regional concern: the lack of coordination among youth parliaments across the OECS and CARICOM. While local contexts differ, there is a glaring absence of a shared framework, best practices, or collaborative efforts among ministries. This fragmentation weakens youth development. Worse still, youth development is too often subsumed under sports development, treating it as an afterthought rather than a core pillar of national progress.

Grenada's approach offers a compelling template. Though not a wholesale solution, it provides a framework grounded in democratic legitimacy, robust training and meaningful participation.

If we're serious about youth inclusion, we need to stop treating youth parliament as a yearly photo op and start making it a real platform for tomorrow's leaders.

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