



Remarks on

Capacity Building of Local Governance Organizations

by

Gladstone Hutchinson, PhD
Director General
Planning Institute of Jamaica

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Introduction

Thank you for this opportunity to share the perspective of the PIOJ on the important matter of *“Capacity Building of Local Governance Organizations”*. The PIOJ is especially pleased to participate in this initiative because it seeks to empower citizens, communities, groups and organizations that are central to the holistic growth, development and well-being of citizens. As stakeholders in the local governance process, you belong to an impressive network of persons who are engaged in development planning and representing civil society across Jamaica. As such, you are well positioned to influence, if not lead, our country’s transformation over the next two decades into *“...the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business”*.

That you are participating in this event declares your commitment to being a part of a more decentralized decision making process across the country. This is an on-going process of Government reform which is intended to, among others things, and quoting from the *Ministry Paper on the Status of Local Govt. Reform*

“establish a decentralized model of local governance which gives a substantial level of self-management to localities/communities, and facilitates meaningful

participation of civil society in the processes of local governance and local sustainable development.”

This means that the issues that you help bring to the fore and prioritise, whether at the community, development area or parish level, will inform public policy. It also means that the knowledge making and planning at community levels will feed into the more strategic planning at Development Area and Parish levels, and finally at the national level.

This was the case with *Vision 2030 Jamaica*, our country’s first long-term national development plan, and the islandwide Parish Visioning Symposia for development of parish plans by the Department of Local Government. The localized knowledge-making and feedback into the planning process, and the important involvement of civil society, were critical to the success of the decentralized strategic planning of which I speak.

Of note, continued progress on the National development Plan will depend on our country addressing the important and pressing governance issues which it faces. A critical element towards this achievement is strengthening the effectiveness of local governance to better ensure broad participation in decision making, and putting in

place mechanisms that are informed by, and responsive to local needs. Enhancing such mechanisms is the trend globally.

In Jamaica, such a response mechanism is very critical at this time when we face volatile, vulnerable and marginalized communities with pressing challenges including crime and violence, poverty, joblessness, especially among youth, large numbers of informal settlements, and vulnerability to natural disasters. Therefore a mechanism at the community and local government levels that is inclusive, equitable, fair and effective is essential to understanding and vetting issues, and to national planning and development.

So you, as members of your respective development groups, need to place and appreciate your efforts within the larger contexts of the National Development Plan, recognizing that its end-goal is also your end-goal. Needless to say, you have long committed to being a serious partner towards this end.

At PIOJ we appreciate fully that your challenges are many and that you are resource constrained, in addition to facing a low level of understanding by the general public as to how to resolve the issues of governance, among many others.

This is why the PIOJ would like to give a special commendation to Mr. Vernon and his staff for the excellent part they are playing in partnering with the PIOJ to help make individuals and communities across Jamaica aware of *Vision 2030 Jamaica*, and of what their role is in its implementation and monitoring, and its ultimate success.

A critical issue therefore is how can the civil society structure help you address these challenges? The design of the local governance structure reflects an attempt to bring planners and implementers together – It represents an integrated approach in which all who have an interest have a say in what happens – which roads are needed, what skills are needed ... where the community centre should be built. Importantly, the local governance structure provides for integration of the work of Government through the Local authorities, with that of civil society.

Your organizations have the potential to partner with Government in significantly improving the response mechanisms of this country. At the PIOJ we are committed to being your teammate in this important effort.

In concluding, it is with great confidence that I give you the charge to press on even in face of the challenges you encounter. Please use as your guiding light the vision of our country achieving developed country status by 2030. Be good partners, good players in the field and in offices, and have the courage to make the necessary compromises and accommodations of the views of others. Be prepared to learn as you go— Development is dynamic and the rules of the game change rather quickly. I charge you at the end of this two-day capacity-building exercise to continue along this exciting and transformational journey with your partners holding your hands and with the fire of the vision burning in your breasts.

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