



NEWS FEATURE

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY GROUPS IN JAMAICA LEADS TO GREATER CITIZEN SECURITY & SAFETY – UNDP YOUTH RESEARCHERS

Kingston, April 26, 2022

Initiatives that are led by young people can be a lever to sustainable citizen safety and security. This was the overall finding at the completion of the UNDP's "Amplifying Youth Voice & Action to address Citizen Security & Safety" project close-out ceremony, held on March 16, 2022.

The project, which started in 2020, enabled the implementation of 10 microprojects that were initiated and implemented by youth. Each of the 10 young entrepreneurs was provided with funding of US\$10 000 to execute the project.

To prepare the entrepreneurs for best outcomes, the project also included guidance from the UNESCO Youth as Researchers (YAR) programme. Three research teams of young people investigated the role and effectiveness of civil society groups, and the role of youth in these groups. They concluded that civil society groups can and do effectively connect communities to national interests. Furthermore, in these groups, young people are key stakeholders who can be valuable in decision making and should not be included for the sake of appearances.

It began with a call to young people for implementable ideas that address citizen security and safety. The individuals gained support to prepare their projects for implementation, the projects were then implemented in communities.

With an eye on the "no poverty" goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is aligned to the Vision 2030 Jamaica, national outcome "effective social protection", "Amplifying Youth Voice & Action to address Citizen Security & Safety" used an incubator approach with the goal of enhancing the capacity of participants to maximize opportunities for their projects, mitigate risks and unleash the potential of the youth-led organizations. Within the incubator, the youth social entrepreneurs were mentored by carefully selected professionals who provided technical support that was important for a successful outcome. This included project design and organizational management and also branding and marketing in order to amplify their voice for advocacy. To ensure alignment with national goals, the young social society entrepreneurs were exposed to Vision 2030 Jamaica and the SDGs.

The projects had to demonstrate how they would have an impact on any of three stated approaches: (1) safety and inclusion; (2) entrepreneurship and unemployment; and (3) mentorship.

Participating youth-led groups were exposed to government policies and programmes that would have some impact on how they shaped their projects, and the possible partnerships that they could forge. The immersion exposed them to the social service environment by allowing them to have hands-on experience. This included teams that conducted research under the YAR programme.

After immersing the youth in the technical side of project implementation, the UNDP then staged an online networking event on World Peace Day as a means of connecting youth leaders across the region. A two-day **Youth Summit on Crime and Violence**, focusing on crime prevention and mitigation was scheduled for *World Peace Day* **September 21 and September 22**, the event showcased innovative solutions that are being implemented by youth groups in pursuit of citizen safety and security in Jamaica, and they discussed how youth participation in crime prevention could be strengthened.

Four initiatives focused on safety and inclusion, and addressed: mental and physical health; effective communication; and physical safety. They are: Bully Proof Kids International; the National Police Youth Club Council of Jamaica; Total Health Services Foundation; and Every Mikkle Foundation.

Bully Proof Kids International project provided two solutions. It empowered children at a primary and infant school to adopt behaviour that can protect themselves from bullies and to also recognise if they are becoming bullies themselves. The secondary offshoot was that the school raised funding to erect a fence, which now separates the playground from an adjoining river course.

The National Police Youth Club Council of Jamaica (NPYCCJ) delivered deaf language training at the Half-Way-Tree police station for members of the Jamaica Constabulary Force. The programme has been applauded by the Commissioner of Police and force members for what it can do for safety and security of the underserved deaf community.

Total Health Services Foundation used the opportunity to continue its mission of taking health services to communities that are hard to reach. The project facilitated telemedicine to the residents and extended it to mental health counselling services.

Every Mickle Foundation is an international organization that provides educational opportunities, stages helpful events, and provides a wide variety of resources for youth.

For the category of Entrepreneurship and Employment there were three projects: I-Seed Youths; Norwood Community Development Centre; and Young Women and Men of Purpose.

I-SEED Youths used strategies to attract unattached youth in Portmore to seek training in life skills and gain certification as security guards.

Norwood Community Development Centre provided two sets of services. Digital literacy and training for seven unattached youth; and training in hydroponic farming to empower 15 unattached youth in that St James community to serve a market and earn their own income.

Young Women and Men of Purpose provided capacity building support for 15 male youth in Manchester communities that are prone to crime and violence among youth. The young men who went, successfully completed the training, and received financial and other support for their entrepreneurial ideas.

The third group was the category of Mentorship and there were three programmes: Call to Lead Jamaica; Youth Inspiring Positive Change; and the Youth For Development Network.

Call to Lead Jamaica supported students of the all-male Alpha Boys Institute with financial assistance that kept them enrolled in school and also provided mentoring to help them to plan for meaningful occupations after graduating.

Youth Inspiring Positive Change created opportunities and mentoring that brought youth into an awareness of the causes of conflict around them, and how to constructively manage conflict. The positive impact so far has allowed the team to receive additional funding to continue its work beyond the UNDP programme.

The Youth for Development Network partnered with the Jahmekya Project and used art to raise awareness of the causes of conflict and how to develop coping skills.

Youth As Researchers mentored three groups in the programme to address the impact of conflict in communities. The research called "Government Programmes on Peace and Security" investigated three questions: (1) How can the implementation of the Zones of Special Operation (ZOSO) impact social and human development? (2) How can the implementation of ZOSOs be improved across Jamaica? What are the testimonies of the residents of the community on the impact of ZOSO? The research yielded that there was community support for the ZOSO as it improved social conditions for residents and restored a sense of personal security. The overriding concern was that the measures need to be sustained. The researchers urged upscaling of the programmes so that gains can be maintained. On the matter of crime, there was a clear indication that residents wanted to be more involved in policies and strategies to combat the crimes that affect them. The team recommended that there should be a study on the impact of all ZOSOs across Jamaica.

Another research project, "Youth-Centric Policy Design for Peace, Citizen Safety and Security" considered the factors that are hindering youth participation in policy formation in relation to citizen safety and security in Jamaica. The group conducted a national survey using an online survey instrument. They noted that 73.0 per cent of the 101 respondents were female; and also that despite efforts, there were no respondents from Portland. Some 69.3 per cent of respondents believed that youth participation in decision making should be integral as youth are inordinately involved in this matter. A total of 89.1 per cent believed that the most important civic duty of an individual is to support community activities. The majority, 62.3 per cent, have never participated in any policymaking process. Many of the respondents reported that, in some instances, youth participation amounts to nothing more than tokenism. Recommendations from the group are: youth be included in decision-making organs; programmes should make proper investments in youth so that they can meaningfully participate; and research and devise ways to make policymaking interesting to youth, regardless of their level of education or exposure. Having gone through this exercise, the youth researchers said that they felt empowered to continue to do additional research with other youth groups. It was noted that an online survey excluded youth with disabilities.

The third group of youth researchers sought to understand how Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) generally function; what roles they play in a community; and the needs they have. Interviews were done in focus group settings. The findings demonstrated that CSOs are important to localising national goals and that young people are important to the success of a CSO in a community. The groups' conclusions are that youth are key stakeholders in communities and they should participate meaningfully in order that actions are sustainable. CSOs are more effective in connecting individuals to national interests than groups coming from outside the community. CSOs also do a good job in creating a welcoming and positive environment for young people, whether it be physical spaces or conversations with others. The CSO is also a consistent and trustworthy support for young people as it provides non-academic roads to success and allows young people to be resources within their societies. The researchers cautioned that when a CSO is no longer able to support the community, this is an opening for danger to enter, and so its sustainability is important.

Partners for the "Amplifying Youth Voice & Action to address Citizen Security & Safety" were the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ); Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ); Ministry of National Security; Ministry of Education, Youth and Information; UNESCO; and Rise Life Management.

-end-

CONTACT:

Gwyneth Harold Davidson

Communication Specialist

Cell: 876-817-8077

Email: ghdavidson@pioj.gov.jm