

**Inter-Agency Network Youth Development Programme Project
Launch
Keynote Address by Dr Lincoln P. Edwards
February 4, 2021**

- Leaders and team members of partner agencies namely:
- The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ)
- the Social Development Commission (SDC)
- the HEART/NSTA Trust
- the HOPE Programme
- the Project Management Global Institute (PMGI) and
- Northern Caribbean University (NCU), through its Morris Entrepreneurship Centre – one of the outreach arms of the University
- Representatives from the diplomatic corps, the private and public sectors, and community based organizations
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good day!! And it is truly **A Good Day**, in fact it's a Great Day, because we are talking about young people, the future of our nation. When the life of a young person is lost at age 22, that is 22 years of investment lost to this nation, and no country can sustain that kind of investment loss at the rate, at which we are going! So I wish to applaud the architects of this Inter-Agency Network Youth Development Programme which is being launched today, because the focus of this project is Jamaica's youth.

The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) has been like a threaded needle bringing the rest of us together and binding us with cords of a solid purpose-driven mission. The Social Development Commission, HEART/ NSTA Trust, the HOPE Programme, the Project Management Global Institute (PMGI), and Northern Caribbean University (NCU), through its Morris Entrepreneurship Centre, have been brought together because each organization was already actively engaged in empowering Jamaica's youth through various programmes and initiatives.

To the partner organizations who are signatory at this event today, congratulations on your passion and focus. To the organizations that are not part of this particular MOU, but who are committed to the youths of Jamaica, the Caribbean and the global community, continue to diligently provide the support our youths need to thrive in these challenging

times. Times of challenge are however, often accompanied by enormous opportunities that need to be unearthed and for our youth to be prepared to pro-actively access. In fact, many of our youth are already leading the way as entrepreneurs through their global connectivity, facilitated by social media and other technology platforms. But we must continue to do the local research and the gap analyses needed to inform us of the lay of the land locally and globally which changes daily.

So what is happening with youth worldwide? According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in their *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020* document, there are more than 64 million unemployed youth worldwide and 145 million young workers living in poverty. Youth employment, therefore, remains a global challenge and a top policy concern for not just the ILO, but for us here in Jamaica, Latin America, and the wider Caribbean, as we all wrestle with the youth **not in employment, education or training**, aka NEET.

Even when employment, education, and training are available, the challenge remains because many youths are either unaware of the opportunities or are not motivated to take advantage of the opportunities. There is an urgent need to build relationships with these youths to have an influence on them. Police youth clubs have been successful; Peace Management initiatives have been successful, but, community centres and Churches have been under-utilized, in the fight against youth development, and unemployment. Specific programs must be developed to target these unattached youths. Churches are led by ministers who know the communities in an intimate way, so they can influence them, and encourage their constituencies to take advantage of the opportunities presented by Government and the Private sector.

Churches have prime buildings that sometimes are only used 2–3 times per week and can be utilized as learning centres, internet sites, and places of refuge for unattached youth. Since Jamaica has more churches per square mile than any other country, then those churches must be mobilized as an important asset to change the trajectory of our youths from violence to vision. I propose that a way be found to provide grants to various churches, specific for youth development programs.

Valuable human resources in the form of teachers and other professionals that are resident in churches, can then be mobilized to form a shield around our youths, and engage them in positive life changing activities. A source of income needs to be provided for the efforts of these individuals.

Let us continue to look at the global picture for a while, because this holds implications for the youth of Jamaica, and the Caribbean.

Globally, **one-fifth** of young people currently have NEET status, which means they are neither gaining experience in the labour market, nor receiving an income from work, nor enhancing their education and skills! Clearly, their full potential is not being realized, though many may be contributing to the economy through unpaid work, which is particularly true of young women. Globally, young women are twice as likely as young men to have NEET status, but in Jamaica the males need special attention.

This programme that we are signing on today, lines up with the global United Nations agenda to positively impact the youth of the planet through its **Thematic sub-working groups for the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD)** in areas of:

- Youth participation
- Employment
- Environment
- Youth participation in peace-building
- Social media
- Youth policy
- Inclusive youth volunteering, and
- UN System-wide Action Plan on Youth

In the March–April 2020 edition of the Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, a longitudinal quasi-experiment on positive youth development in Jamaica done by Darrell M. Hull, et al, revealed the following:

- Unattached youth pose serious problems for developing nations
- Positive youth development (PYD) programs are effective for altering developmental trajectories.
- Longer term outcomes require additional investment to sustain developmental changes, and
- Positive Youth Development programmes should be extended beyond initial administration to support unattached youth.

And so here we are today, working together to implement a positive youth development initiative.

Additional investment to sustain what we have started, beyond programme implementation, is going to be a critical success factor in this positive youth development initiative – **AND** – working together, working collaboratively as organizations and individuals with the good of the nation's youth as our common objective, will move us from where we are to where we need to be. The local scenario with our youth is on each doorstep and street corner, in every community in Jamaica, land we love.

Opportunities must be created close to home, for youths, whether training or employment. When students or youths migrate from the rural areas to urban areas, they risk losing the moderating influence of friends and family, and some succumb to the lure of the urban culture and before long they are recruited into activities that their families do not approve of. Invest in the rural areas by providing the infrastructure for development and strong educational institutions.

In 2018, two institutions from Jamaica, one rural and one urban placed first and second in the international business model competition, from among 6000 teams, with fifth place going to Johns Hopkins, and this demonstrates what is possible when we challenge our youths, provide them with access, and send them forth, so they can compete with the best in the world. This IBMC involves entrepreneurship and Jamaicans are natural entrepreneurs and so entities like the MEC at NCU, under the leadership of Mrs. Hazel O'Conner, have successfully guided the natural talent of youths so their business ideas can bear fruit and they can become successful.

The Community, Counselling & Restorative Justice Centre (CCRJC), is another outreach arm of NCU that works alongside governmental organizations such as: the Victim Support Unit and the Centre for the Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse, and others, to provide intervention, restorative justice, and a plethora of other services including empowerment training seminars relevant to parents, youth and children.

UNESCO has indicated in one of their publications, that for a developing country to sustain development, 40-50% of its population must have access to tertiary education. **We are no more than 20%, so we have a long way to go** towards sustainable development! This means that government institutions alone cannot fill the gap. Private educational institutions must be empowered with additional resources to capture these youths and bring them into the mainstream. This is a matter of national security and so a common vision must be crafted. Other interest groups and institutions have begun this imperative work. At NCU, we have crafted the RESCUE program to assist in addressing the challenges among our youths.

Partnership with this interagency group allows us to join forces with our colleagues in service to play our role in national development.

Earlier I referred to the global persistence of the youth NEET challenge with NEET meaning: **not in employment, education or training**. Our nation is reeling from the negative impact of too many persons whose values and work ethics are way below the standard needed to lift themselves and propel Jamaica-Land-We-Love to become the place of choice to live, work, raise families, and do business as outlined in our country's National Development Plan - Vision 2030 Jamaica. The Home, the School, and the Church were the places where the driving influence for our children, instilling the values, attitudes norms and morals deemed essential to build character, and ennobling the thoughts and mind.

Education and Training are, therefore, critical success factors for Employment or Self-Employment through Entrepreneurship. Our youth can then be rid of the NEET category meaning **Not in Employment, Education or Training** and instead move into the **EETE** category – **Ethical, Educated, Trained and Employed**. They and their families will, therefore, be able to EAT a food. Yes, and EAT means just that, to feed themselves and improve their standard of living on a sustained basis (SMILE). So today, I am calling for the youth of Jamaica, from Morant point to Negril point, to this newly minted EETE Category, and with our help they will definitely become young women and men who are **Ethical, Educated, Trained and Employed**.

Sources:

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