



The Jeffrey Town Model for Community Development

Ivy Veronica Gordon

VOL. 1, No. 2

Abstract

The Jeffrey Town model for community development has been effectively applied to the rural community of Jeffrey Town in Jamaica with Information and Computer Technology (ICT) as a key element. The farmer's association is the vehicle that has driven the change.

Included is a brief outline of the community plus highlights of the tangible and intangible components of the model. Special attention is paid to the investment in the human capital to help build capacity of all locals without exploitation so that real empowerment could begin.

Jeffrey Town is a success story validating the modern development assistance programmes whereby communities are empowered, allowed to select their own imperatives and, in this case, redressing some of those difficulties with superb results.

Introduction

Jeffrey Town is located in the northeastern portion of Jamaica, formerly called Victoria Town and subsequently named after the Jeffrey's family that owned the Salisbury property from as far back as 1838. It is fifteen miles in any direction from each of the rural towns, and forty-five miles from the capital Kingston. It is at an elevation of seventeen hundred feet and considered deeply rural because of the social infrastructure in place and the quality of the access roads to the village. Jeffrey Town has nine different churches, and a school building made of containers joined together because the previous building was destroyed by fire in September 1996.

In the census of 2011 the population was recorded as 2982, forty seven percent female, distributed between eight hundred and seventy seven households. It further states that unemployment is at 33% of those at working age; and of those working 42.2% engage in agriculture on family owned lands.

If you look past the tropical beauty of the location and relatively low crime rate one has to ask, what would this community be like without its renowned self reliance and its drive for development? Since 1991 when the Farmers Association formed as a cooperative Jeffrey Town has been seeking ways to redress the lack of investment in line with its mission statement to "... harness all available assistance for community development using agriculture as the platform; to sustainably develop its human and physical resources, for the creation of opportunities to include all the residents of Jeffrey Town, especially the youth and women to achieve social and economic stability." The association had to lobby first for water in 1993, for rural electrification in 1998 and garbage collection took years of agitation before service commenced in 2003.

The group members embarked on their own research, started the tradition of self assessment, firstly of the community and then internally, to see how best to redress the major challenges: firstly mechanization, irrigation and the environment for the farmers' income generating activities and, secondly, a way to engage and provide opportunities for the youth.

The Group

The history of the association can be traced back through its minute books plus data at the Companies Office of Jamaica. The association is a group of paying members who live in and around Jeffrey Town, since 2005; Wordsworth Gordon has been inspirational at the helm. The group recognized that it needed help to meet its goals and was fortunate enough to be supported by the United Nations Development Programme LIFE and the Canada International Development Agency in 2002/3, the first to strengthen and extend the executive to eight and to teach us how to operate in a transparent and sustainable way, and the second to draft a business plan and register as a development company limited by guarantee. Thus empowered the members set out to create a model community looking at all the facets of village life.

Approach

Applications to funding agencies were made for three areas (the idea was to do what we could until we could do what we wanted and although the tasks were categorized fate caused us to deal with them simultaneously): a LIFE project to install portable irrigation on five farms, two small grants to purchase and convert a container and use it as an office, the conceptualization of the Breadfruit Festival and a project application for 'Community without Borders' with ICT for Development Jamaica. The projects were linked, not in the form of counter funding but as parts of the puzzle that when complete would become the Jeffrey Town Model. The cost of the container was prohibitive so we aimed to construct from block and steel on a parcel of donated land, since a secure location was needed for the ICT project specifically selected to encourage the younger people to come and join the group.

The significant investment in the human capital started here, however, the recorded data begins in 2007 and is shown as person- days, the number of people engaged in a training activity multiplied by the number of days, broken down into four focal areas as seen in Table 1 below. Table 1 does not reflect the services of the ICT specialist Peace Corps Volunteer who assisted all who used the multimedia centre on a one- to-one basis from its opening in February 2007, to his departure in August 2008 .On close inspection you will note a significant amount of ICT training in 2009/10 this is a result of the on line literacy classes offered in conjunction with HEART, the national training agency where the twenty three learners were exposed to basic computer skills and were certified on completion at the grade nine literacy and numeracy levels.

Table 1. The number of person days devoted to training activities.

Year	ICT	Radio	Institutional Strengthening	Environmental Disaster
2007-08	255	72	80	180
2008-09	110	80	20	48
2009-10	600	110	20	30
2010-11		126	25	8
2011-12			30	175

2012-13		20	18	60
	965	408	193	501

In previous years the focus was on youth involvement through ICT. In this community youth unemployment is above the 33 percent average (as defined by the national census), with this group showing a real reluctance to go into agriculture. As many as twenty five young people per year were exposed to the use of software applications, digital photography, video, creating music and audio production editing. Of this original youth cadre nine still give voluntary service to the multimedia centre and radio station, eight have gone on to further education, and seven more to full-time employment, with two in mainstream media.

Prior to the radio our farming and environmental training were empirical; a facilitator would be found, usually from the agriculture support services, and field days would be organized or demonstration plots set up. One expects it is the same elsewhere, however, in Jeffrey Town we took this one step further. Each of the soil retention techniques was written into the activities of the funded projects which enabled the farmers to collectively apply the measures on a series of farms. This was then reinforced with Power Point presentations at the monthly meetings and this served two purposes: it allowed us to hone our ICT skills and introduced a new method of training to our community.

The location and way of life forces one to acknowledge climate change and the environmental training and activities were tailored with that in mind, using the holistic approach. Land instability is the greatest threat because of the clay-based soil and the frequency of landslide during or after excessive rain. The aim was, and still is, to redress this risk. Construction is a skill that was already present in Jeffrey Town but on- the-job training in gabion wall building in late 2008 has reaped real dividends, culminating in a 150-cubic-yard intervention in the valley. As our community members mastered a skill we moved on, calling back for the "experts" as required.

Training advanced to mitigation measures and with it the activities of tree planting, checking dams, harvesting water from roofs and from natural sources, contouring, and, of course, developing a hybrid alternative energy system for sustainability of the environment and relief from the costs associated with running a radio, multimedia centre and a bank of freezers.

Last but not least is the radio component of the training; our main learning facilitator has been the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and through them, the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC) plus ICT for Development Jamaica. Training courses commenced in 2007 with basic principles, guidelines towards preparation plus voice and speech work for the core group a little after the license arrived but before the broadcast equipment. The COL interventions, one in 2008 and two in 2009, in Jeffrey Town and St. Vincent were geared towards purpose, sustainability and content, helping us to understand the true value and power of radio as a platform, allowing the team to carefully consider the pressing issues and ask which areas reflect the widest pool of local knowledge. The environment and agriculture were natural choices, hence the integration of radio programming towards our mitigation intentions with the bold aim of beginning to broadcast our first climate change series in December 2009 so that we could have a climate change discussion in Jeffrey Town while the whole world was watching the Copenhagen conference.

Ours was the inaugural group in the Caribbean to pilot a new method of programme making, nominally called the participatory approach, where members of the wider community along with the relevant professionals, were invited to get involved in the programme making process along with our youth members, thereby creating series that reflected the true voice of the people. The content answered the questions of the target audience and reflected the main points the "experts" insist are relevant; aired at the times the target group felt was most appropriate.

The first climate change series was an information packed, ten-part radio production on global warming related directly to our communities but which also spoke to the wider issues of hurricanes, floods, droughts, conservation, pollution and more. Each of the shows consists of the following elements: The Narrator, a Fact File, the Voice of the People, the Discourse or Interview, and a drama written as an independent feature with a set of characters in an imaginary town named Jet, after the radio station. Each episode elaborates on the show theme. This item is the most popular radio feature within the community and is now a well-loved independent production. Targeted music and advertisements from the

Voices for Climate Change completes the features.

Since then we have been able to address some critical needs by presenting education material regarding HIV/AIDS, child abuse, and incest, by running a vigorous anti-human trafficking campaign, and by creating a Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) integrated science syllabus support series for our high school students. Additionally we have run special broadcasts to the farming group for feedback and, of course, special interest groups to gather comments on relevance and content. We have run listener participation quizzes related to the maternal health series and included an interactive segment where the community is able to "Ask Nurse". We are now using text messaging on a computer and a cell phone as an additional interactive tool and data collection system. In 2014 we will upgrade to live call-in shows.

Using this formula and a largely similar style we have created an annual environmental education and awareness series to highlight and explain the actions being taken by the group in our ongoing climate change mitigation work. Of note here is that financial support for the process and the radio broadcasts as a whole is being considered at an institutional level as an element of each project that can be quantified, justified and delivered.

The members of the production team have advanced to online distance learning, still supported by COL, and the annual series now due will be a product of this process, showing the fulfillment of a dream, ordinary community people sufficiently empowered firstly by contact teaching in an informal setting, graduating to distance learning; passing on their skills to their peers and producing meaningful content related to their local realities.

In general we have been able to achieve all of this because of determination and good facilitation ; people have helped and many have done more than their financial compensations required. However, there were challenges in finding persons with the necessary skill and who were willing to come so far to share. Integrity is critical on both sides of the development equation, just as vision and passion drive the process. When the burning ambition for broadband internet was articulated and supported initially in 2008, our community couldn't know how this type of access would advance our independence and self reliance. It was exorbitantly expensive due to our location and lack of basic infrastructure but has since been supported with free to access "wi fi". Once a person has a wireless enabled device, they can access the internet outside of our facility twenty-four hours a day. This is something that can be observed on the road side, at bus shelters, in the local bar even at the grave yard. The thirst for internet access has been ignited community wide and to an extent is being fulfilled.

Conclusion

Jeffrey Town has benefited from the work of a group of people within leading the process to a common goal of making their community a place where all can feel comfortable. In this society 58.4% of the residents own the land they live on, much of it passed down through the generations, which makes moving an unacceptable or very unlikely option. Who wouldn't want to live in structurally secure environs with tree lined streets , sufficient lighting for safety, water, recreational facilities and, above all, business opportunities or employment? The Jeffrey Town model developed through the farmer's association has produced all of these things:

- Six gabion walls, ten check dams, terracing with pineapples
- Twenty-seven acres planted with fruit trees plus five acres of Pride of Barbados on two miles of roadside.
- Solar Street lights in four locations and alternative energy at the JTFA Building.
- A revolving cadre of youth being initiated to radio production and multimedia.
- Water harvesting.
- A brand new Type 1 clinic and Basic School.
- A community radio station broadcasting programmes relevant to the rural lifestyle.
- An internet hot spot with free access.
- Group chicken raising and value added products.

These are the tangibles; they can be touched, quantified and photographed. How do you quantify the intangibles , such as the pride of a community, the collective and individual empowerment that has arisen through more than two thousand days of targeted training, replication at community meetings using PowerPoints, the drip feeding from the community radio that reinforces best practises? It's not possible. Since 2006 the drive for development has been at full pace, with ICT leading the way with an internet cafe, literacy classes, a summer school in 2013, multimedia classes and radio programming, underlining all of the

physical activities and supporting social issues as well as the school curriculum. This is a model that requires consideration based on the evidence presented, a group of people taking a penetrative look at their situation and then through hard work, critical support and good fortune, a marginalized community has risen and changed its situation. It is our contention that development must be a process, that initiative should be present in a location, and that capacity can be built as it has been at Jeffrey Town; all else can be replicated to fit the community at hand.

Ivy Veronica Gordon teaches food and nutrition and heads the home economics department at Guy's Hill High School. Her community development work began in 1995 when she joined the Jeffrey Town Farmers Association. She also edits the *Jeffrey Town Bulletin*, published quarterly on their web site, and authored the *Jeffrey Town Story*. E-mail: jeffreytownfarmers@gmail.com
