

JAMAICA

THE JAMAICA URBAN POVERTY PROJECT IN KINGSTON

The Jamaica Urban Poverty Project has transformed the inner city of Kingston from a place of violence, fear and poverty to a centre of cooperation, revitalization and hope. Using innovative strategies to strengthen public/private partnerships, broad-based participation, and local capacity building, the Kingston Restoration Corporation has built a model of urban development and restoration.

In the mid-1980s the inner neighbourhoods of Kingston, Jamaica's capital, were rife with crime, street violence, rampant unemployment, and social unrest. These conditions resulted from several decades of deterioration of social and economic conditions, gang warfare, and the destruction and vandalism of physical infrastructure and public spaces. Businesses abandoned the Downtown zone, and residents fled the area in droves. By 1985, poverty was endemic amongst remaining residents and more than 25% of the commercial buildings in some areas were ruined or abandoned.

The Kingston Restoration Corporation (KRC), founded in 1983, stepped into this seemingly hopeless situation with a mission 'to assist in the creation of the conditions necessary for sustainable physical, cultural, social and economic development of downtown Kingston'. The KRC's founders (a group of leading businesspeople working in cooperation with the government's Urban Development Corporation) recognized the importance of investment in people and their communities as a precondition for improvements in physical conditions and infrastructure. The KRC proposed a partnership between public and private sectors in a series of integrated initiatives to stimulate the economy, create jobs, reduce urban poverty, restore commercial and residential physical infrastructure, and revitalize the community.

In the mid-1990s, the KRC expanded their interventions from the primarily residential areas of Central Kingston to Western Kingston in response to an upsurge of violence in those areas. Jones Town, a community of 12,000 residents located within two-miles of Downtown Kingston, was selected as the pilot site for the new initiative. When KRC first approached the area, 42% of Jones Town's labour force was unemployed, and most of the area's housing stock was dilapidated or abandoned. Garbage



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was piled high on the streets. Residents were stigmatised, and found it hard to obtain a job having a Jones Town home address.

The project began with the preparation of an Integrated Jones Town Redevelopment Plan. Capitalising on past experience with multi-actor partnerships, the KRC involved a diverse group of stakeholders, including the National Inner-city Committee, the University of Technology Jamaica, the University of the West Indies, selected professionals, the Jones Town Area Council, and local residents. The Government of the Netherlands provided initial financial support. The resulting multi-faceted programme, called the Jamaican Urban Poverty Project (JUPP), was launched in September 1997 with support from the Jamaican Government and funding from the British Government.

In its initial phases, the Jamaican Urban Poverty Project focused on four key areas:

- the reduction of poverty in the community by improving and increasing the residents' capacity to earn an income through education and skills training, aimed at employment and income generation from micro-enterprises and small business development;
- development of the residents' ability to work together to build their community through the acquisition of different skills, and inter-community action to resolve problems and issues;
- improved environmental conditions through better management, education enhancement of built areas, housing restoration and development and maintenance of infrastructure including roads and drainage;
- development of strong community based organisations and institutions to increasingly implement and manage the Jones Town Redevelopment Project.

A high level of community participation was a key element in the planning process - Jones Town's strong sense of community spirit in spite of the debilitating environment was one of the reasons for its selection as the pilot project site. A participatory planning process based on the 'Planning for real' model revealed five priorities: community safety, capacity building, environment and sanitation, education, and micro-enterprise. Projects in each priority area were divided into three categories: projects that could be undertaken in less than two months with no

or little outside support; projects that would require several months and some external support; and projects that were long term and would require significant and sustained external resources. Immediate action projects received widespread public attention and raised public confidence.

Making Jones Town a safer place was a high priority for residents. Violence and instability had caused the area's only bus service to be suspended, and taxi drivers refused to serve the community. The KRC negotiated the return of the bus service, backed by the community's promise to guarantee the safety of the drivers. Taxi drivers, seeing the success of this initiative, began to return to the area. The improved transport services have enabled Jones Town residents to obtain and keep employment in the city centre and have stimulated business activity and investment.

Other participatory strategies were drawn upon to increase community safety. KRC mobilised the community to clean solid waste from abandoned sites. Streetlights and street signs were installed to allow residents to move around easily and safely. Community/police consultative committees were formed to increase cooperation and to provide training in health, safety, and legal and civic rights. Conflict and dispute resolution workshops were provided for residents with the cooperation of local agencies and NGOs. A mother's centre was created to educate the public about domestic violence and to provide a day shelter for teenage mothers and victims of domestic abuse.

The project has maintained an integrated approach, linking smaller schemes in specific sectors to a broader vision of community development. Individual initiatives are elements in a network of projects.

The Jamaica Urban Poverty Project has been called 'a breath of fresh air' in the inner city communities. Assessment has demonstrated the positive changes in these communities, which have tangibly improved the lives of residents through increased safety and mobility, a cleaner environment, better buildings and infrastructure, and broader community awareness. Several key principles and strategies have contributed to the success of the JUPP that can be applied to urban revitalisation projects in other cities. These include a focus on partnerships, political neutrality, broad community participation, high-visibility achievements, and effective vertical linkages.