

ASSESSMENT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN JAMAICA EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The British Council, in partnership with Life Management Services has launched a project geared towards strengthening the role of civil society in Jamaica. The project has a four-fold objective:

- Increased awareness and understanding by citizens of their rights and duties
- Strengthened institutional and operational capacities of civil society organizations
- Increased accessibility to direct funding for advocacy
- Greater awareness of human rights and democracy issues among youths

In order to accomplish these results, a comprehensive analysis of civil society organizations and the environment within which they operate was undertaken, and includes areas of strengths, weaknesses and gaps to be bridged; constructs that are critical to the formulation of policies and initiatives that will allow for the necessary remedial action.

The methodology employed involved extensive desk research and in-depth interviews. Two of the three interviews that were done morphed into case studies of two youth organizations: Manifesto Jamaica and Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network. It was intended that a depth interview would also be conducted with a human rights organization; unfortunately, the cooperation of those contacted was not forthcoming.

Adopting the World Bank's definition, *"The term civil society refers to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations"*. The eight categories of CSOs identified by the World Bank were further broken down by CIVICUS into 22 different types amounting to over 3,000. The Council of Voluntary Social Services (CVSS) has on registry over 115 NGOs, while the Social Development Commission (SDC) has enlisted 2,903 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) as at October 31, 2012. Of this amount, 2,283 were active and 241 partially active. There is an estimated 39 CSOs focused on Human Rights and Democracy.

There is a long history of CSO activity in Jamaican that dates back to the 18th century, which evolves out of a spirit of volunteerism. During its earliest manifestation following the abolition of slavery, Free Villages were established by neighbours helping each other to erect structures and the building of roads and other civil works through voluntary service. The activities and main features of CSOs have significantly changed since then.

In the current context, CSO activity is defined by a heavy dependence on international donors for funding, in light of relatively low charitable giving by individuals and companies. Furthermore, there is a declining spirit of volunteerism which has adversely affected participation in CSO organizations, particularly advocacy and service CSOs. While registration among NGOs are comparatively high, the majority of CBOs, which account for the largest percentage of CSOs, are unregistered. It is believed that the passage of the Local Government Reform Act would be an important catalyst to change this. However, it is worth noting that Local Government Reform has been commissioned since 1993.

Even though there are funding challenges and a declining spirit of volunteerism, the socio-economic climate dictates increasing importance of CSO activity, particularly as the country grapple with significant amounts of human rights violations. Among the most noted human rights issues that must be addressed are extrajudicial killings by the police, ineffective judicial system, lengthy delays in the resolution of human rights issues, violence against and abuse of children, violence against and abuse of women, and human trafficking. Additionally, democracy issues such as corruption, poor governance and campaign financing irregularities all needing urgent attention.

Jamaicans for Justice, Citizens for Free and Fair Elections and Jamaica Coalition of Civil Service Organizations have been at the forefront of the battle, ably assisted by several other organizations. The activity and accomplishment of these organizations are notable in the areas of legislative impact, lobbying and advocacy for human rights, providing legal representation for citizens whose rights have been violated and building public awareness.

All CSO organizations are different, with varied strengths, institutional and operational gaps. Therefore, in addition to assessing the strengths and gaps for CSOs, a case study was done for two youth organizations using a Capacity Building Survey tool. Manifesto Jamaica realized an average score of 3.1 points out of 5, while Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network was ascribed an average of 3.7 points. The main areas of strength for Manifesto Jamaica was Management, while Infrastructure, Logistics and Financial Management were key institutional and operation gaps. Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network reflected strength in Management, Governance, External Relationships, Infrastructure and Logistics. Financial Management was the main institution and operational gap.

Generally the strengths of CSOs include commitment and passion, broad knowledge base, media relationships, good donor relationships, networking and collaborations, as well as recognition and respect of the GOJ, while the gaps exist in the form of funding challenges, human resource deficiencies, weak governance and management structure, and project implementation shortcomings.