

Preamble

Talk Up Yout' (TUY), convened by Emprezz Golding and supported by a team of local and international partners, has sought to provide young people from every corner of our nation with the most important opportunity to raise their voices on the issues that matter most to them. Since January 2017, **Talk Up Yout'**, in an esteemed partnership with the **United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF)** has chosen to embark on an even grander project- **Youth Empowerment Through Dialogue** - which gives young people (14-25) a chance to voice their concerns, as well as provide them with the necessary tools to create and to advocate for the solutions ourselves.

Throughout the last two years, **TUY** has engaged over 1200 students and young people from different backgrounds, different environments and different points of view in its workshops and townhalls. In each of our fourteen parishes, Jamaica's young people have both eloquently and passionately indicated which issues mattered most to them. In summation of these proceedings, we have identified four principle concerns that resonated throughout our diverse corps of participants. Those being: **education and employment; corruption and democratic apathy; crime** (esp. sexual violence against young girls); and **infrastructure**.

1A. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Tertiary education is not fully funded by the Jamaican government; and, depending on what programme of study the student opts to pursue, the scholarship/financial support is basically limited or non-existent. Nevertheless, our young people still chase tertiary and further education as a means to not only empower and better themselves; but, to contribute to the country that has given them so much but often times incurring record amounts of debt as a consequence. We have for instance, students pursuing the three year Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) programme at the University of the West Indies, Mona; a programme which costs \$10,000 USD per annum and which is the only one at the university which is not government sponsored. This massive financial burden has not only turned away some of the brightest minds from following their dreams and making worthwhile societal contributions, but it has prevented many who could overcome initially and got into the faculty from going beyond the first year.

However, for many students the accumulation of debt is only the tip of the iceberg. After painstakingly completing their programmes of study – be it in forensics, veterinary science and/or engineering, as some of our participants have declared – they struggle to find jobs in that field – as

the job market is severely limited or as is the case worldwide, a particular industry has been rendered irrelevant owing to the advent of technology. And, as such, many of our most brilliant Jamaicans sit at home or where they are lucky, they are cornered into low-paying jobs like those at the call centres.

1B. SOLUTIONS

The participants of the programme – some of whom had very palpable frustrations – have made some proposals on how this particular issue could be resolved:

- (1) Encourage the tertiary and further education institutions to start taking a market demand based approach in the enrolling of students. The government and the universities would evaluate the job market – using statistics and other information from the government and industry bodies - and per that assessment, they could: (a) limit or expand class sizes; and, (b) appropriate funds to the subsidisation of said programmes, in accordance with industry demands.
- (2) Particularly in the skilled and technical fields – a point quite pertinent in light of the infrastructure ‘Legacy Projects’ initiated by the Most Honourable Prime Minister (Andrew Michael Holness O.N., the Member for West Central Saint Andrew) – there needs to be strict quotas on how many Jamaicans versus foreign labourers can work on each site.
- (3) Implement a programme which would provide young graduates with opportunities to intern in their fields – either in the public or private sectors – giving said graduates the well sought after ‘work experience’ that has too often prevented them getting work.
- (4) Increase public awareness for the existing funding opportunities.
- (5) In secondary/high schools, the government should mandate that all students engage in skilled training. Employing this strategy will make students more employable after leaving secondary education, as they would have certification in a skill. This would allow them an alternative option to earn disposable income as they pursue tertiary education.
- (6) Mandate that a career guidance component be included in the secondary school curriculum to encourage students to critically think about their desired career path. Through this process students would begin to map the road to their desired profession and start taking steps toward achieving their goal before leaving school. This would decrease the likelihood of them leaving high school and becoming unemployed.

2A. CORRUPTION AND DEMOCRATIC APATHY

Trading Economics in 2019 ranked Jamaica as the 68th least corrupt country in the world out of 178 countries. And, whilst the students were willing to concede that there have been efforts made to curb this problem, corruption nevertheless remains rife in the country; and, that has in turn contributed to massive democratic apathy amongst young people. To quote Peter Espeut in his article published January 18, 2019, “many Jamaicans have developed a tolerance for corruption....their moral sensibilities have become numb and deadened because of its frequency”; and, this disillusion is affecting our society in subtle but ultimately disastrous ways. In the last two elections, voter turnout has been less than 50% and based on the discussions held with the participants, that trend is very much likely to continue. From said discussions, we ascertained that the vast majority of the participants knew very little or nothing about the political process; nor, about the number or role of MPs in the House of Representatives or who their Members of Parliament were. The icing on this cake however was that none of the age appropriate students were registered to vote, knew where to register to vote or had an intention of registering, because of the aforementioned democratic apathy. In a country like ours where 45.52% of our population is under the age of 24 years, high rates of democratic apathy especially amongst young people is a recipe for perpetuated corruption in Jamaica. Governments elected in any state, in a two party system and on the express preference of only a quarter of the population means that said government will never truly be held accountable for their actions or inactions. Concomitantly, young people are affected because governments that do believe that our segment of the population are not going to vote for them – or vote at all – are less likely to create policies in their interests.

2B. SOLUTIONS

The youth participants have come up with some solutions to further educate our young people about the political system and the process; and, to foster engagement in same. The government can:

- (1) Have mandatory citizenship education in secondary schools, where the existing Social Studies curriculum will be expanded and universally taught akin to Mathematics and English Language at the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate level as a means to resolve the deficit of basic knowledge amongst young people; and,

- (2) Encourage the Electoral Commission of Jamaica to have voter registration drives – an activity that is frequent in US presidential and other elections, and has been credited to have increased the voter turnout amongst African Americans – at our universities and even our Sixth Forms. One of the biggest issues raised by the participants was that they did not know where they could register to vote or that it was inconvenient for them to leave campus to go through the process of registration.
- (3) A similar solution could be automatic voter registration like some states in the United States when young student go about obtaining TRNs, Driver's Licenses or the soon to be implemented National Identity Card (NIDS).

3A. CRIME (ESPECIALLY SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN)

As most would readily admit crime is the foremost issue affecting Jamaican society. This issue does have significant relevance to and bearing on the lives of the nation's youth. There is justifiable, growing concern for the number of heinous crimes and acts of violence being committed by as well as against our youth. Particular attention needs to be paid to marginalized young inner city males who are at higher risk of: being drawn into gang activities, being victim of police discrimination and brutality, dropping out of school, and difficulty finding gainful employment. There also exists a culture of domestic abuse and violence which sometimes escalates and ends with a murder or murder-suicide. Sexual abuse of children is also a worrying issue which has been appearing far too frequently as persons in positions of authority or trust abuse this to take advantage of minors.

3B. Solutions:

- (1) Rebuilding the nation's confidence in the JCF. Many persons do not trust the police, and if they do not trust the police they will be hesitant to, or will not report crimes. The JCF needs to revise its community policing strategies as well as involvement and interactions within the community. As reported in the news there are officers who are involved in criminal activities and are in league with gangs and their affiliates. Persons fear that if they report criminals to the police their identities will be revealed to these dangerous people or the police won't be able to protect them. Where trust between civilians and police is high then persons are more likely to report crimes and volunteer information about criminal activity. Police youth clubs are a good way to start building these relationships, they are seemingly however suffering island wide from lack of membership in the most at risk ages 15-25 years. There needs to be

a greater drive to get young people interested in the well-being of and decreasing criminality in their communities.

- (2) It has been established that where young males drop out of school there is a greater likelihood they will become involved in criminality. Gangs are always looking to recruit unattached youth. A possible solution is the creation of a department in the Ministry of Education dedicated to truancy and investigating cases of students not attending school regularly. This department would be staffed with social workers who would engage families on a case by case basis to try to get youth back in school as soon as possible.
- (3) A solution to combat domestic violence in the country is by increased public awareness about the protection under the law afforded to those who have experienced domestic violence. Many who experience domestic violence, especially women tend to believe it is a private matter that does not require outside intervention. Many of them also do not know about the protection afforded to them under the Jamaica Domestic Violence Act. They need to be taught about the risks of allowing violence within intimate relationships to continue without intervention, the many examples of homicides borne out of domestic violence in order for the culture of violence between partners to end. Persons should report any signs of violence in a relationship to the police, the mind your own business approach could lead to tragic loss of life.
- (4) As it relates to sexual crimes against children, there should be increased sentences for sexual offences against minors. There is also the need for a public education campaign about signs of sexual and other abuse in children and what to do if you suspect a child is being abused.

4A. INFRASTRUCTURE

As mentioned in the preamble, the participants of the programme have indicated which other topics were of key interest to them personally and for our demographic as a whole. Like the rest of the country, young people have expressed concern about the state of the nation's infrastructure and – as mentioned above – the methods by which the government has gone about resolving this issue. Many of the participants, most notably a young gentleman from Portmore, Saint Catherine, expressed their anger with the fact that the Chinese government, their state-owned corporations and their citizens have been in control of these projects and what seems to be increasing control over Jamaica and the Jamaican government. As discussed under the heading of **education and employment**, the young man indicated that young Jamaicans workers are rarely being employed on these big projects

despite their qualification and where they are employed, they are subjected to questionable and possibly substandard working environments – as provided in numerous news reports in 2018.

Further to this and across the country especially outside of the Kingston Metropolitan region several participants highlighted the derelict state of roads, the lack of water and the lack of street lights. In the case of the street lights in some parishes like Westmoreland, the lack of them is believed to compromise safety and security of the parish. In Portland and St. Mary the lack of roads was cited as a serious issue. The lack of roads will affect students getting to school as the various modes of transportation are unwilling to travel on some roads.

The issue of water supply was highlighted across the island. Many believed the issue was not sources of water but the lack of access. The issue of access must be addressed if the country is to develop and reach its 2030 development goals. Therefore proper infrastructure must be put in place to ensure all residents from all parishes have access to potable water and not have to walk miles to catch water. The consequence of no access to water is that the country runs the risk of increasing illnesses such as gastro-enteritis and dengue due to improper storage of water as well as reduced usage as there is no access.

With respect to infrastructure the youth are in dire need of spaces to build networks and participate in social and income generating activities. This was highlighted across the country especially in the parishes of Westmoreland, St. Elizabeth, St. Thomas and Hanover.

4B. SOLUTIONS

- (1) Develop an MOU with the Chinese which sets minimum quotas for Jamaican workers
- (2) Work with the residents and local officials to identify roads to be fixed and work along with the Ministry of Finance to ensure funds are identified for fixing roads especially those roads which connect youth to schools
- (3) Work with NWC and/or private water companies to develop a water distribution plan for the country over the next 2-5 years.
- (4) Identify youth friendly spaces in each parish/constituency where youth can gather and develop social networks which builds their capacity and the capacity of their communities.

This can be done in association with government agencies such as the SDC

Declaration of Intent

This advocacy agenda is the culmination of a two year long drive – initiated by 'Talk Up Yout' and its partners – to not only provide the young people with the opportunity to speak up and speak loudly on the issues that matter most to them. The programme also aimed to arm us with the knowledge and the tools to champion their causes and advocate for solutions. The importance in providing this voice and training is summed up quite simply in the demographic realities of Jamaica, which last showed that close to 50.00% of the population is under the age of thirty years. What this means is that the voices of this large and quite significant group can no longer go unheard by those in-charge. And, with that that said, the voices and concerns must be taken seriously when policies are being drafted in kind.

Our first step has been to detail our key concerns and possible solutions in writing and in person – at the town hall held in November 2018. But, the voicing of our concerns is only that: a first step. Akin to the rolling out of this agenda, a partnership is a necessity if we are to move these concerns and proposals from being merely words said or written but into actual actions done and policies initiated. In reading and signing on to this agenda, those in-charge are committing themselves and the entities they represent to continue the empowerment of our trained advocates and other young people island wide so that these problems we are having can finally be addressed. There exists the well recited adage that “the youth are the future [of Jamaica]” and without doubt or apology, we are prepared to step up to the plate. But in order to be the beacon shining on the hill, providing our beloved nation with the bright future that it deserves and needs, we need your help to keep that light shining.

Be the spark, dear friends. Help us young Jamaicans create the nation that we all hope and know she is yearning to be. By signing this document you commit to working with youth to solving these issues in Jamaica.

Thank you.

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