

Building community resilience in a time of COVID-19 pandemic in selected communities in Jamaica: Community engagement

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Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- explore the approach taken by one university stakeholder in response to the needs of vulnerable residents in seven marginalized communities
- highlight the experiences in building local community resilience during the pandemic.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study:

- 1) What were the major issues that affected the community during the COVID-19 crisis?
- 2) What measures have been implemented to help communities manage and adapt coping mechanism during this crisis?
- 3) How has the community been recovering and mitigating against further effects of crisis situations?

Background

Jamaica's social context is of primary significance in consideration of its many under-resourced communities. The country has undergone social and developmental challenges which have impacted the vulnerable population. Recent escalations of gender-based violence and elder abuse have contributed to the crime and violence endemic in society.

Jamaica's vulnerable population resides in several under-served communities throughout the island. During the pandemic, these groups were adversely affected resulting in a significant impact on their social well-being.

Individual's struggle for basic needs and to coexist peacefully in communities and opportunities for advancement was compromised.

Accordingly, the onus fell on corporate stakeholders such as the University of the West Indies (UWI) to demonstrate social accountability. One way the UWI demonstrated social accountability was to support/build community resilience through its community civic engagement and outreach initiatives.

Literature Review - Resilience

- The UWI's contribution to building community resilience and the effectiveness of social accountability of stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic add to the discourse on community engagement.
- While the literature on community resilience focuses largely on natural disasters, researchers suggest resilience is intrinsic to the individual (Southwick et al., 2014) while others refer to resilience in a more holistic sense.
- One researcher sees resilience as the competencies or capacities of people (Duchek, 2020) while others refer to it as a positive function in the face of adversity (Southwick et al., 2014).
- Resilience theory, therefore, is an appropriate lens through which community resilience can be explored

Literature Review – Community Engagement

- Community engagement has been advanced as “a means of enabling people who lack the power to gain control over their lives” (Brunton et al., 2017, p. 1).
- Community engagement is action-oriented and involves communities in decision-making, planning, design, governance, and delivery of services (Swainston & Summerbell, 2008).
- These views are also embedded in the concept that community engagement encompasses consultation, collaboration, and/or community control (Boote et al., 2002).
- Wilcox (1994) suggests that community engagement is secondary to information-giving, which needed to be supplemented with other types and levels of engagement such as university-community engagement space.

Methodology

An exploratory research design was employed comprising a combined technique of focus group discussions and interviews.

A purposive sampling technique was used to solicit 28 participants from 7 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and focus group discussions with 12 communities in rural and urban Jamaica.

Data were collected, uploaded into NVivo, and analysed for themes.

The analysis generated several policy recommendations which the government can effect to mitigate the impact of pandemics on marginalised communities in Jamaica.

Ethical considerations followed the Declaration of Helsinki.

Communities Engaged

12 communities

URBAN COMMUNITIES

- Stand Pipe,
- Airpipe
- Mona Common
- Chambers Lane
- August Town
- Hermitage
- Goldsmith Villa
- Bedward Gardens
- African Gardens

RURAL COMUNITIES

- Linstead
- Braes River
- Treasure Beach

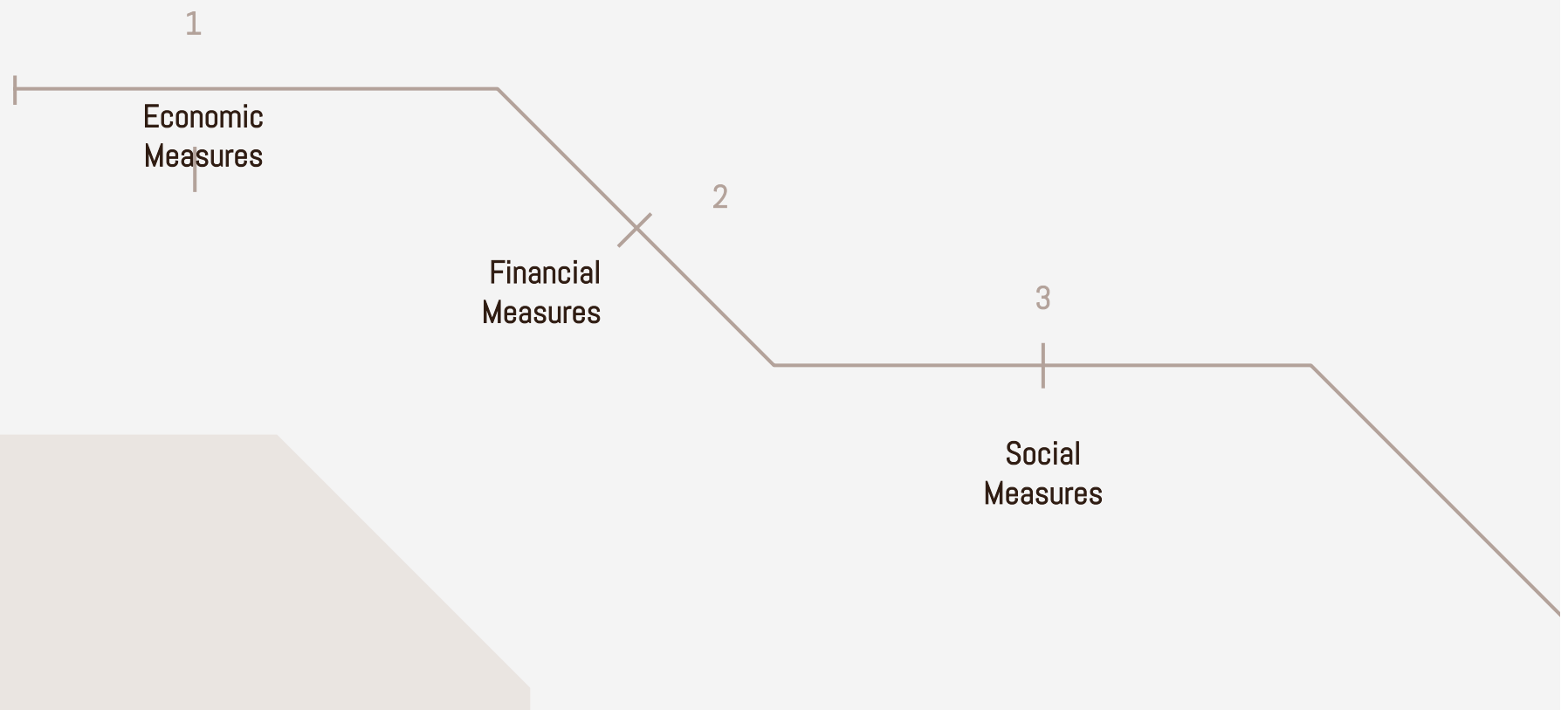


Findings

RQ 1: What were the major issues that affected the community during the COVID-19 crisis?

- ✓ Children and Schools
- ✓ Economic impact and the role of small businesses
- ✓ Tourism and Community Implications
- ✓ Unemployment
- ✓ Entertainment Industry closure
- ✓ People with Alternate abilities and senior citizens
- ✓ Issues of Violence

RQ 2: What measures have been implemented to help communities manage and adapt coping mechanism during this crisis?



RQ: 3 How has the community been recovering and mitigating against further effects of crisis situations?

- ✓ CBOs implemented other social accountability
- ✓ Compassion Grants
- ✓ NGOs provided for over 500 vulnerable residents
- ✓ Grant to ensure connectivity with family and friends
- ✓ Digital technology
- ✓ Digital economy
- ✓ Social safety net
- ✓ Capacity-building training
- ✓ Observing health protocols
- ✓ CARE packages and sanitizing distribution

Policy Implications - The government should:



Social Spending and Expansion

Undertake periodic evaluation towards an increase in social spending through the expansion of the robust social programs that could target vulnerable households.



Digitising

Advance digitising of the economy to include socially excluded and vulnerable residents who have no access to technology.



CBOs

Utilise CBOs to identify vulnerable individuals for addition to databases

Recommendations

SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Efforts must continue in active collaboration with the private sector and NGOs to prolong registration efforts to expand the safety net

FORMALISE

Recognize informal community workers



DIGITISE

Increasing efforts to digitise the economy, strengthen the social safety net, and.

COMMITMENT

Guidelines to devise measures to continue the provision of services to the target population.

Conclusion

- ✓ COVID-19 adversely affected globally marginalized communities based on the challenges that came with it. However, while building and enhancing human and social capital, community members were motivated and the different resilience factors shared.
- ✓ Community organizing and building collective power were identified through the assistance of the GoJ and NGOs who took proactive approach to build resilient communities.
- ✓ Through community financing for social, economic approaches, many universities have engaged communities to be resilient by training, civic engagement, providing welfare packages, and guiding their response to cope with stressors within challenging times

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