

Contribution to the

Sectoral Debate

2013/2014

***Community Empowerment & Involvement: Key to
Successful Local Governance***

Presented by

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South East St Catherine

MINISTER OF STATE

**MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

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Acknowledgements

Mr Speaker, my presentation today will be my sixth and second as Minister of State in this Honourable House and I look forward to participating in many more in the years to come. I thank the Almighty for his grace and mercies in carrying me through thus far.

Mr Speaker the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller has given me the opportunity to serve this country as State Minister and I want to thank her for her confidence and trust.

Mr sincere gratitude and thanks to the people of South East St. Catherine who I have the honour and privilege to represent. I would not be here today speaking in this Honourable House without their support. Their vote of confidence inspires me to work even harder as Member of Parliament while I balance my responsibilities as Minister of State.

Against this background, I want to hail the working team of Councillors Fenley Douglas, Alric Campbell, Horace Brown, Renair Benjamin and Keith Blake, and of course the Secretary and Executive members of the Constituency.

My deepest appreciation to my senior Minister the Honourable Noel Arscott, Permanent Secretary Mr Robert Rainford, the senior management team and dedicated staff of the Ministry of Local Government & Community Development to include my personal staff; Advisor/Consultant, Executive Assistant, Executive Secretary, Chauffeur and Security; Chairmen and Councillors of the island's fourteen (14) Local Authorities including my own Mayor, George Lee, Board Chairmen, directors and staff of Ministry's five (5) agencies and department.

I acknowledge you, Mr Speaker for your guidance over these proceedings, as well as my colleague MPs and other members on this side of the House.

I also acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition and members on the other side of the House, you are essential to the robust democracy we enjoy in this great nation.

Lastly, but by no means least, I take this opportunity to express my deepest love and appreciation for my family, especially my wife and children who have been very supportive and who have shared in the challenges of the constituency and the burdens of representational politics.

Introduction

Mr Speaker against the background of the earlier presentation made by senior Minister the Honourable Noel Arscott, allow me to enhance the demonstration of the Ministry's effort to develop communities by involving everybody, through community empowerment and social interventions, in the business of local governance.

To achieve the desired result; to facilitate the development of settlements and communities that can deliver sustainable first world services, we must continue to be guided by the recommendations of the report from the National Advisory Committee on Local Government Reform. Mr Speaker the proposal for Local Government Reform purports that citizen empowerment and participation is an essential ingredient in this enabling, efficient and responsive local government system that we are seeking to create...

As the Ministry of Local Government & Community Development now moves to revitalize local governance we continue to follow the guidelines left for us by the likes of the late Professor Rex Nettleford while building on those recommendations to further improve our participatory model with new and evolving partnerships with other government entities and NGOs, local and international entities and our local communities.

Constituency Highlights

Mr Speaker, as a product of the local government system I employ the same approach in my constituency and consistently seek the input and participation of the citizens whom I serve. I have had success in getting consensus on priority issues, as well as in lobbying various arms of government towards implementation of programmes to improve the lives of the citizens of my constituency.

Improvement in Infrastructure Development

Mr Speaker, we all know the story of Portmore. It began as a large area for schematic residential development in the 1950s and 60s under the Portmore Land Development Company. After basic physical infrastructure such as roads was established, and due to the increased demand for housing in Kingston, the WIHCON organization built thousands of prototype housing units in an effort to alleviate the over-population of the capital city. The first scheme was called Independence City, followed closely by Edgewater Villas. As the population of Portmore grew, the UDC in 1977 started to plan and provide for infrastructure for the growing community. Community centres, schools, police stations, post offices, a library, and medical facilities were built.

Mr Speaker, the official population of Portmore now stands at over 180,000. However, we have heard, as recently as last week, suggestions by persons in officialdom that that estimate may be off-target by as much as sixty percent (60%). Mr Speaker, I will not join that debate now; what is evident is that there has been astronomical growth in the number of housing solutions in Portmore and the development of physical infrastructure such as water, sewerage, parks, markets, and other necessary amenities has not kept pace with the growth in population.

As a result, Mr Speaker, residents in Portmore now experience significant deficiencies in water supply. It is not unusual for residents to get home, or wake up to go to work, and find that there is no water in their pipes. In many cases, when there is water, the pressure is low; and at other times, the water is badly discoloured. Mr Speaker, the people of Portmore deserve better, and as Member of Parliament, I have lobbied hard for significant improvements in this area. I am therefore pleased, Mr Speaker, that over J\$1 Billion was spent on the development of new water sources which included South East St. Catherine. The project involved the construction of 10 kilometres (km) of 30 inch transmission main from the Rio Cobre pipeline in Caymanas, across Mandela Highway, along Municipal Boulevard, and to the existing Marley Hill Reservoir at Braeton.

Mr Speaker, it also included reinforcement of the distribution network in Passage Fort Drive, Germaine Road, Port Henderson Drive, and Portmore Parkway. Mr Speaker, while the inconsistent water supply has not been fully resolved, it has certainly improved. The residents in areas of Cumberland, Edgewater, Independence City, Passage Fort and Waterford, to name a few, are already experiencing the benefits of this work which was completed in May 2013 – two (2) months ahead of schedule.

Mr Speaker, we are not finished yet. Phase Two (2) of this water supply improvement exercise is underway. This will see the replacement of the transmission line from Flat Bridge to Mandela Highway. This will then be interconnected with the transmission line that was recently completed. This Phase is expected to take eighteen months (18). After which Mr Speaker, the residents of Portmore will have a consistent, and reliable high-pressured quality water for the first time in a long time, and in some cases, for the first time at last.

Mr Speaker, another area of concern in Portmore is that of sewerage. There are five (5) wastewater treatment plants (WWTP), and over 95% of the population in the area is connected to NWC sewerage. Five (5) of these sewerage treatment plants, namely Independence City Wastewater Treatment Plant, Bridgeport WWTP, Hamilton Gardens WWTP, Caymanas Gardens WWTP, and Portmore Villas WWTP, are in an advanced state of disrepair; none is operating satisfactorily. Mr Speaker, the discomfort is experienced by the citizens of Portmore in the poor air quality and mosquito nuisance, the corresponding health and environmental hazards are well known. The situation represents a clear and present danger and is a long standing problem that has concerned me since my days as Councillor. In fact, Mr Speaker, I have spoken to this issue at every presentation that I have made in this Honourable House – especially as it relates to Bridgeport and Independence City.

Mr Speaker, as a result of the foregoing, in a true spirit of community, a collaborative approach has been taken to finding solutions to this problem. The Ministry of Water, Land, Environment & Climate Change via the National Water Commission, in consultation with other stakeholders and political representatives has developed the *Portmore Sewerage Project*. This will see the decommissioning of the five (5) wastewater treatment plants mentioned earlier and the delivery of the sewage to the new Soapberry Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Mr Speaker, this project has already been tendered and has been recommended to the National Contracts Commission. It is expected that work will begin before the end of this

fiscal year, and should be completed within twenty four (24) months. Mr Speaker, it will represent a new day for South East St. Catherine and the adjoining communities where people can once again breathe fresh air, and be spared, even a little, from the attacks of flies and mosquitoes.

High School Education

Mr Speaker, some of our high schools are severely challenged in delivering quality education. This is due to a combination of factors including indiscipline, violence, and lack of adequate resources. The three (3) high schools in South East St. Catherine - namely Bridgeport High, Cumberland High and Waterford High - are however, experiencing varying levels of success because we are blessed with hard working principals, teachers and support staff.

Mr Speaker, I want to speak specifically to Bridgeport High School. Bridgeport High School remains the premier high school in Portmore. Some of the achievements are evident through the academics, performing arts and sports. The list of accolades includes:

- 2 time Manning Cup Champions 2001, 2006;
- Walker Cup Champions 2001;
- Olivier Shield 2006;
- 2nd in Boys' Champs 2002;
- Top CSEC performance in various subject areas;
- Students matriculating directly to Medical Sciences;

And I could go on...

Mr Speaker, with this kind of performance, it is important that we support the efforts of the school's management team; as we should with all schools. Bridgeport High School was first built to accommodate 800 students, and today, with the same infrastructure, the school accommodates over 2000 students. In the early days, the school was 'fed' by a few primary schools in the Portmore region. However, with the population growth, the number of feeder schools has increased, and so have the number of students.

Mr Speaker, a plan was developed by the Ministry of Education with a view of adding a block of six (6) classrooms. That plan is yet to be implemented. As a result, overcrowding is now a major problem at the institution and the school is now on the shift system.

Mr Speaker, the shift system is one of the major weaknesses in our education system and we will never be able to develop a world-class education system unless we rid ourselves of it. It creates an imbalanced education system that punishes students who are placed in shift

schools. Those students receive less contact hours with teachers, participate less in extra-curricular activities, and are on the road earlier in the morning and later at nights than the average students.

Along with other stakeholders in the area, I am recommending that Bridgeport High School be taken off the shift system. Even though the school is producing top quality students it will not be able to reach its goal of being a premier institution if the shift system under which it operates is not abolished.

Mr Speaker, I recognize that the Ministry is constructing the new Cedar Grove High School. I am urging that we now look at the construction of the additional class room block at Bridgeport. The combination of these two (2) projects could pave the way for Bridgeport to return to a single shift system. The school has the potential to achieve more, the stakeholders are anxious to achieve more. We need the support and that is ultimately the discontinuation of the shift system.

While I lobby for an end to the shift system at Bridgeport High School I acknowledge that there is much to be done to assist schools in general. Mr Speaker, it is incumbent upon us as political representatives to find innovative ways of assisting our schools; it is not always about money, it cannot be, as that is one resource that is in short supply. As such we are intrigued by the Ministry of Education's proposal regarding the establishment of Circles of Excellence this could work very well in a contained area such as Portmore. In that regard, Mr Speaker, I will be engaging my fellow political representatives, the principals and the Ministry of Education to establish such a body for the Portmore area. This could lead to significant achievements through the exchange of best practices and team work as schools learn from each other based on their different strengths.

With these projects, plans and suggestions and by initiating partnerships and accommodating citizens input, I believe the community of Portmore will continue to grow from strength to strength.

Portfolio Matters

Portmore Municipality

Mr Speaker it is very coincidental that in the week of my presentation to this Honourable House the community of Portmore celebrates its 10th anniversary as a Municipality, and with its very first elected Mayor Mr George Lee, back at the helm.

Naturally, I will use this forum to congratulate the Council and highlight the fact that this innovation, the Portmore Municipal Council, is Jamaica's most profound demonstration of citizen empowerment and involvement at work.

Last year when I addressed this Honourable House, I reflected on my past experience and involvement in the Municipality. I shared my early days as Secretary of the Initial Joint Citizens Association, Chairman of the First City Council and Deputy Mayor of the Portmore Municipal Council and how those early forays into community life laid the foundation of my conviction of the benefits of citizens' participation in local governance.

I had also advised that I had instructed that a consultative review be undertaken with all stakeholders of the Portmore Municipality on the recommendations which had been contained in the Final Report presented by the Consultant who had been contracted to do an Assessment of the Portmore Municipality Experience. I further pointed out that an Interim Action Plan had been created around a range of actions geared towards the conclusion of this Phase of the Portmore Municipality experience and creating a blue print for the way forward.

I am happy to announce Mr Speaker that all activities related to the engagement of the stakeholders on the recommendations of the Consultant's Report have been completed and I have in my possession a Draft Final Report for my preliminary comments after which, I will proceed to engage the citizens/stakeholders of Portmore using this Report and the recommendations contained therein.

The Report has an aggressive implementation schedule through to March 2015 and addresses a range of subjects including Organisational Review of the Portmore Municipal Council, Communication Programmes for stakeholders, Review and Re-constitution of the Portmore Citizen Advisory Council (PCAC), Information Computer Technology interventions, Feedback Mechanisms for Citizens, Local Economic Development Programme, Vacant Public Land Projects, Voting power of the Mayor and Local Sustainable Development Plan preparation as well as a Business Survey.

I look forward to reporting to this Honourable House in a year from now on the tremendous strides, the Portmore Municipality would have taken if we are faithful to the commitment to move forward on the recommendations shared, and agreed on by its citizens, for the advancement of good local governance.

Town Centres

Mr Speaker we cannot speak about Local Governance without emphasizing and articulating the fundamental commitment of providing citizens and communities with increased ability and space within which to participate in the management of their affairs. This of course was the intent of the Portmore Municipality. However, smaller Urban Centres, which might not have the ability to meet the criteria for Municipality status, also have the need for some self-expression of local self-management and it is this type of situation that resonates well with the concept of Town Centres and Town Managers.

The Government of which I am a part has clearly recognised this need and the Local Government Manifesto of 2012 spoke to this as a strategic objective to be realised. When the Administration assumed office, one of the key components of our Revitalisation of Local Governance initiative was the creation of Town Centres as a responsive form of Government to many of the issues, which negatively impact our Urban Centres.

Pilots Town Centres - Old Harbour & Linstead

In this context Mr Speaker we are moving ahead with plans to established Town Centres Island-wide and have selected the parish of St. Catherine as the pilot parish with locations; Linstead and Old Harbour, two (2) highly populated and growing Towns with many feeder districts and villages.

Job Description for a Town Manager has been created and we have projected a start-up date for November 2013 for these Town Centres to be operational. We have engaged the Mayor and Council of St Catherine. Sensitization and mobilization at the community and Local Authority levels are advancing through the Social Development Commission (SDC). We expect shortly to begin discussions with stakeholders in Ocho Rios, St. Ann and Santa Cruz and Junction, St. Elizabeth.

The SDC will continue to be the critical enablers for participation and consensus with respect to Civil Society Organizations and their response and relationship with the management of Town Centres.

Papine Town Centre/ University Town

While we have been conceptualising and seeking to implement what we consider to be sensible and practical responses to issues that impact our Urban Centres, stakeholders in the Papine, August Town, Mona, Tavern, Karachi, Eleston Flats, Highlight View, Land Lease Liguanea, and Kintyre communities have been meeting to discuss how their Urban Centres could be delineated to better support the major activities that are conducted in these areas, i.e. a University Town. This of course reflects an approach similar to our policy around a responsive government to the concerns of Urban Centres.

Last year in this Honourable House, I referred to the work that was being done by stakeholders in that development area. The work continues Mr Speaker as my colleague, MP Andre Hylton reflected on in his recent Sectoral Presentation.

Mr Speaker, this matter is now at a stage where the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development have been brought in to facilitate the community's desire for their future development. In this regard and with a view to expedite the process in accordance with the Local Governance Revitalization efforts, we have met recently with the Stakeholders.

I pause here Mr Speaker, to pay tribute to all the stakeholders particularly, the University of Technology, for facilitating that process in a very dynamic manner. The University has been very amenable to discussions with citizens in its environs about the establishment of a University Town. These discussions are most prudent as we bring government even closer to the people, putting more control and decision making power in the hands of the people who are most directly impacted by those decisions.

Our facilitation Mr Speaker is within the context of the role of the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC) as the Local Planning Authority, in respect of its mandate for good governance and sustainable development of Kingston and St Andrew. The KSAC will in short order, seek to consider and make a decision regarding the appropriate Name and Management Structure to be pursued.

Jamaica Fire Brigade

Mr Speaker, in respect of the Jamaica Fire Brigade, the important role this entity plays in sustainable community development cannot be over emphasized. Even so, no one with intimate knowledge of the Brigade's operations can deny that it has, for several years, been operating under less than favourable conditions.

Yes, there are challenges; inadequate financing has long hindered the desired large scale upgrading of processes, equipment and fire stations, but it is the reality of the economic situation in which we govern.

The Opposition Spokesman on Local Government last Tuesday spoke to his impression that not enough is being done in respect of the Jamaica Fire Brigade, Mr Speaker I noted his comments, and I appreciate his concerns as well as his passion. I too am eager to see our fire service lifted to first-world standards. I want to assure this Honourable House and the opposition member that despite the challenges we have not thrown in the towel, we are taking deliberate steps within the confines of financial constraints even as measures are being pursued to have the JFB play an integral role in social intervention initiatives that are evolving; but I will say more about that later. Our approach, Mr Speaker, is incremental improvement; we intend to win the battle one round at a time.

Equipment

Where equipment is concerned Mr Speaker, during the period under review a comprehensive repair programme was pursued in respect of fire units and ambulances. Additionally, decisive action was taken to complete the acquisition of 3 new fire engines; we are now awaiting delivery of those units.

Mr Speaker the Opposition Spokesman alluded to these purchases having been initiated some time ago, and he is correct, what he might be unaware of is the fact that the process had not even left the ground. It wasn't until after I was assigned responsibility for the JFB and my enquiries yielded information that document relating to this proposed acquisition had been with the National Works Agency (NWA) that the necessary steps were taken to actually put the acquisition process on track.

Mr Speaker, the records show that no fire engines were added to the service by the previous Jamaica Labour Party Administration, fire engines delivered during that time were commissioned during the previous PNP administration.

Continuing on the subject of fire engines, the Opposition Spokesman also bemoaned the fact that a fire engine malfunctioned on the scene of the Wyndham Hotel fire; while there was an unfortunate malfunction of the mechanism used to deploy the ladder, the member's anxiety was unnecessary. In fact Mr Speaker I am disappointed in the utterances of the opposition spokesman on this issue, as it has been extensively ventilated and is common knowledge that there had been seven other fire engines on the scene at the time. Although the Opposition spokesman raised some pertinent issues during his presentation he was hitting below the belt again with that one, I consider it an affront on the reputation of the fire-fighters and the work that they did that day, I for one want to take a moment to acknowledge them for their efforts that controlled, confined and extinguished the fire preventing wide scale damage to the property.

Capacity Building

Mr Speaker, moving on to capacity building; there can be no doubt that the greatest asset of the Jamaica Fire Brigade is its staff, in this respect the Brigade recruited and trained 344 additional fire-fighters during the 2012/2013 fiscal year. Significant investment was also made in human resource development as officers participated in a number of training initiatives. Additionally, in recognition of the importance of succession planning to its continued effective operations, the high standard of leadership we have come to expect from the Jamaica Fire Brigade has been secured with twenty (20) officers having been trained in Advance Leadership.

Training School & Brigade Headquarters

Mr Speaker on the matter of a training school and headquarters for the Brigade, the comments of the Opposition Spokesman about identified lands not being utilized is rather ironic, because Mr Speaker, the lands have laid in waste for the longest period under his Government's administration and there is no record of any progress having been made towards developing the facility during that time.

Mr Speaker the fact is it is a massive financial undertaking that successive administrations have been unable to consummate. We are however moving ahead with plans to establish the facilities on the lands in Twickenham Park. Inter-Ministerial as well as other discussions are being advanced in the context of the Logistics Hub and the implications for fire services on the island. Considerations regarding our response to emergencies and corresponding contingencies are being addressed. These discussions are now at a delicate stage Mr Speaker; at the appropriate time I will advise the Minister who will then take a decision as to when to make an announcement.

Fire Stations

Regarding the state of our fire stations, our fire-fighters have for years been very patient with us as leaders, I want to extend my personal gratitude to them for having recognized the financial limitations of the Ministry over the years, and to assure them that strident efforts are being made to address the situation.

I will now highlight some of these efforts; efforts that were in part made successful due to the community involvement; efforts which I am sure the Opposition Spokesman will appreciate.

Last year I reported that fire-fighters from the Trench Town and Port Royal fire stations had been relocated due to the discovery of asbestos containing material in the roofs of these facilities. Mr Speaker many of our government buildings were constructed at a time when the dangers of asbestos were not so well known, and it was the most economical construction material, therefore it will come as no surprise to you that some of our institutional buildings were constructed with the material which we now know poses a real health risk when it begins to deteriorate.

Mr Speaker I am happy to report that after a very rigorous tender and bidding process a company was chosen, from a very limited number of experts in asbestos removal, to eliminate the harmful material.

Through public/private partnership with Quality Dealers Mr Speaker we took the opportunity to address other improvements before moving our fire-fighters back home in November of 2012.

With respect to the Port Royal Fire station, I have received from the Commissioner a report pertaining to the sampling and investigations conducted by the Ministry of Labour and have accepted the findings and the recommendation is not to replace the roof at this time.

Mr Speaker we have sensitized the firemen to the findings of the inspections and the actions that will be taken which involves annual inspections and monitoring to ensure that the asbestos is still contained; I have approved remedial work to be effected at the facilities before the fire-fighters are returned.

The Santa Cruz Fire Station also benefitted from rehabilitation work completed_during the period under review. The fire station had been closed by the Health Department almost five years ago due to a rat bat infestation of the timber in the roof. That Station was also re-

opened in November of 2012 as a result of collaboration and a display of good citizenship which resulted in the scope of work being expanded to address other upgrades.

The Ministry through the St Elizabeth Parish Council, provided most of the funding for those repairs while former Member of Parliament Kern Spencer contributed One Million Dollars (J\$1M) of his Constituency Development Fund, Guardian Life Insurance Company contributed five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000.00), and fire-fighters from that station as well as St Catherine 'lent' their hands to the completion of this project. **This is true demonstration of community involvement and corporate social responsibility.**

Mr Speaker plans are progressing to address several other fire stations, emanating from observations I made during an island-wide tour executed last year.

The Savanna-la-mar fire station is one such station. A technical team from the Ministry visited the station, effected the necessary modifications to the original drawing and completed the proposals for the adjustments. As I speak Mr Speaker, a structural engineer is working on a design, other processes leading to and including tendering and selection of contractor is expected to be completed within two months of the approval of the engineer's drawing, thereafter work will commence.

We are also advancing plans to renovate the St. Ann's Bay Fire Station. This project is due to commence in August of this year.

In Manchester minor repairs will be effected to the Christiana Fire Station. Presently, the documentation for the initiation of this project is being prepared.

The roof of the Frankfield Fire Station in Clarendon is to be replaced. The documentation for the start of that project is also presently being prepared.

Incremental improvement, Mr Speaker; as I said before, the prevailing situation at the Jamaica Fire Brigade is a long standing one, our interest is in seeing how best we can utilize limited resources to make the necessary improvements. It benefits no one, least of all the men and women of the Brigade, for us to employ our time in this Honourable House assigning blame, the JFB is too important to be used as a punching bag. I however felt it necessary to address the 'concerns' raised by the Opposition Spokesman.

Mr Speaker I wrap up my report on fire stations with the one closest to home, the Portmore Fire Station. This is the only fire station serving what is said to be the largest residential community in the English Speaking Caribbean.

This Fire Station, being one of the newer constructions, is structurally sound however there were areas that needed improvement. We took advantage of the opportunity presented by the commemoration of National Labour Day 2013 to address these issues. Once again Mr Speaker community involvement/social enterprise, proved invaluable. Donations were received from Berger Paint Limited, and Sunlight Windows Limited and the men and women of the wider JFB, as well as, the neighbourhood volunteered their time to improve the facilities of their community fire station.

Mr Speaker the value of donations and work was over one point five million dollars (J\$1.5M); other donations were pledged.

Mr Speaker the work that has been done at the Portmore fire station is significant viewed within the context of local government's commitment to community empowerment through social interventions. It is also in tune with our commitment to providing citizens and communities with increased space within which to carryout activities that contribute to effective local governance because, it is our intention to have this station house the pilot for a programme which seeks to transform fire stations across the island into community outreach centres.

Working with the SDC, we intend to establish a resource and homework centre, as well as a youth corps marching band.

The idea of housing homework centres at fire stations isn't novel, as such facilities existed previously in Trench Town and Denham Town however, Mr Speaker we are building on the concept substantially. This centre will be fully computerized offering internet access and facilitating research. It will serve Waterford and the adjoining communities of Passage Fort, Independence City and sections of Gregory Park.

Mr Speaker too many of our young people are without suitable places to study and without sufficient positive avenues to expend the seemingly endless reservoir of energy they possess. **This** is how we see the facilities of our fire stations addressing this problem.

Additionally we believe, like the late British Economist William Henry Beveridge, that “Ignorance is an evil weed, which dictators may cultivate among their dupes, but which no democracy can afford among its citizens” as such Mr Speaker the program proposes to not only provide facilities for grades five and six students to prepare for their Grade Six Achievement Tests (GSAT) and for other students to be assisted with homework, reading and communication skills as well as on-going mentorship and character-building; but the facilities will also support the information needs of adults in the community.

Furthermore it is expected to;

- Provide skills training to community and development area members.
- Improve literacy, computer skills and exam-results for young people in the community.
- Utilize technology as a tool to foster educational development with lifelong (adult) learning.
- Facilitate access to the internet and communication by residents

This, Mr Speaker, is a transformational approach to community development which will impact the social and economic landscape of the communities through improvement in young people’s chances of gaining employment and or matriculation when they advance in education, as well as, a reduction in poverty levels as users become more employable through skills gained.

The Jamaica Fire Brigade will implement the project and continue to oversee its operation complemented by a Community Advisory/Management Committee. The employees, officers and approved volunteers at the Portmore Fire Station will manage the operation of the Computer and Internet Access Point-site hence the Manual of Operations and Management will be prepared.

Again through the Social Development Commission, we are approaching the Universal Access Fund for budgetary support for the Resource and Homework Centre project which we expect to be on stream by September of this year.

Mr Speaker in the case of the pilot, the Information and Resource Centre will be the catalyst for youth corps marching band mentioned earlier, however this is a concept we will be exploring in all fire stations with or without resource centres. We believe it is important for our youth to be actively involved in community affairs.

Mr Speaker we recognize that the Brigade must continue to grow, to improve its ability to provide the levels of service delivery that our more demanding populace requires in order to serve in and contribute to, new approaches being applied to community governance and development. Also important Mr Speaker, is its impact and implications regarding the Logistics Hub.

We continue to address this need step by step and we will strengthen the Jamaica Fire Brigade. It is going to happen Mr Speaker, but it is not going to happen overnight. Establishing partnerships is essential to securing much needed resources and this is why we are in dialogue with multi-national agencies to charter the way forward.

Conclusion

In closing Mr Speaker, I wish to remind this Honourable House and the wider public that citizen involvement is at the very heart of the democratic process. This is even more critical at the local level, where our efforts to revitalize local governance are hinged on the pillars of accountability, transparency and citizen participation.

Consequently, while we push the legislative process to conclusion and vigorously pursue avenues for local economic development, as you heard from Minister Arscott two weeks ago, we are deeply conscious that these efforts will be futile unless the citizens whose lives we seek to better through such initiatives are empowered to actively and effectively participate in the process to transform their own lives and that of their communities. In essence Mr Speaker our approach is firmly grounded in that well known adage: “It is better to teach a man to fish than to give him a fish”.

That Mr Speaker, is the fundamental goal that we seek to achieve through the initiatives, and programmes that we have developed, are developing and are in the process of implementing; and which I have sought to highlight in this Presentation:

- I. The review of and consultation on the Portmore experience, as well as implementation of the subsequent recommendations, all being pursued through citizen participation and involvement.
- II. Taking advantage of the renewed interest of our corporate citizens to bolster our efforts to upgrade our fire services.
- III. Extending application of the principle of local self-governance, through the concepts of Town Centres and Town Managers, and in which citizen participation constitute an essential element in the management of Urban Centres.
- IV. Our ambitious plan for fire stations which incorporates teamwork, leadership development and community and empowerment.

Mr Speaker, as we build on existing initiatives and find innovative ways to optimize the limited resources that are available to address the overwhelming demands that confront us daily, several new social intervention concepts, strategies and practices are emerging that provide hope for success in our efforts to transform our communities – concepts such as Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurs and Social Enterprise.

What we are talking about Mr Speaker, are new and exciting ways of approaching and solving our most pressing social problems.

We are talking about community organizations and businesses coming to the realization of the enormous impact which their inputs can make in achieving the goal of effective local governance and sustainable local development.

We are talking about citizens being empowered to identify opportunities and unused or under-utilized human capital that exist within their surroundings, and to transform these previously dormant resources into productive assets that can become the main contributors to community development and prosperity.

Mr Speaker, gone are the days when any one person or set of persons (Minister or Politician) have a monopoly on the skills and tools required for Social or Community Development; The paradigm has shifted. We are empowering citizens and arming them with skills and creative space to become social entrepreneurs and practitioners who can fashion their own upliftment. In this way, we are ensuring that the talents, energies and creativity of the total Jamaican people are given full expression and are directed towards solving local problems as well as achieving local and national development goals.

In this regard I pay special tribute to all Ministries and agencies of Government and our civil society and private sector partners that have contributed substantially and have facilitated the development and implementation of the new participatory framework and paradigm, which has enabled citizens to become full partners in the governance and development processes. In this regard, I specially recognize the Ministry's Reform Team and own Social Development Commission, as they continue to be trail-blazers in the community development process through community education, social interventions and public forums, validating the notion that **Community Empowerment and Involvement is the key to effective local governance.**

I Thank You.