

Advocacy, Biodiversity, Climate Change Resilience Building  
and Youth Empowerment

Author: Adrian Watson, Kingston, Jamaica, W.I.

In the era of mass development we have seen changes in how government of countries operate and how resources are handle. The thought process for what is considered a resource is defined by what is easily exploitable, quantifiable and ensure power to those already considered to be a position of great wealth. Those services that are essential to the preservation of life and balance of the ecosystem are not easily ascribed a dollar value. The questions is to be asked; which is real economics or the environment? Which is an artificial construct environmental services or money services? While we search for these answers we will realize that that there is an unequal balance between the environment and the economy proven by Climate Change, Pollution, Mass Extinction but a well-established global economy that capitalizes and consumes on everything it touches including itself.

*"Neoclassical economics is the most sublime defense of the status quo ever devised"*

*EK Hunt*

In light of this there are more questions to be asked who benefits from activities that causes harm? Who suffers from environmental harm? To try an answer all this we must look at a few areas that affects to life as we currently know it. These areas include energy, disasters, the next generation, water, biodiversity, climate change, health, and sustainable livelihoods.

Jamaica is a very well-known area, internationally as a "biodiversity hotspot" because many of the island's species are endemic to the island— meaning they are found nowhere else in the world. Jamaica is ranked 5th in the world in terms of endemic plants, and boasts a very impressive list of spectacular animal species that are also found nowhere else on the planet. Jamaica needs to undertake the saving the island's rich collection of unique plant and animal species, and the natural habitats that support them. Future generations should be left with a healthy environment that contains all the ingredients for proper ecosystem functions. As evidence to this the region sees five hundred and thirteen (513) species of birds of which one hundred and seventy three (173) are endemic to the region of which twenty nine (29) are endemic to Jamaica. Unfortunately fifty nine (59) regional endemics are globally threatened of which seventeen (17) are critically endangered and of those critically endangered two (2) are endemic to Jamaica. For Jamaica these endemics were once found island wide but are now restricted to forest reserves and untouched forests. This means Blue and John Crow Mountain forest reserves and the Cockpit Country. The Cockpit Country is under threat from bauxite mining. Twenty eight (28) of the twenty nine (29) endemic birds to Jamaica Have strong hold population within the Cockpit Country. We owe it to our children to leave them with all the species that still exist. We must leave them with a Jamaica that can still provide the ecosystem services that all life relies on – for example, clean air, water and land. But the threat of climate change is compounding the environmental threats that are already faced by the islands. Jamaica has polluted and disrupted most of the wetland ecosystems that provide large ecosystem services. Cases in point the discharge of effluent and solid waste in the Kingston Harbour. The Hunts Bay within the harbour is devoid of most of the animal wild life with the red mangroves disappearing from the Seaview Gardens side of the harbour.

**Every child dream** of is asked the question at least once; what do you want to become when you grow up? This in light of not knowing real world struggles of an adult life. An eight boy's answers were the traditional doctor or lawyer or a scientist. The later became true as that eight year child grew up to become a Geographer and Zoologist.

*I was that child.*

As children Jamaicans are expected to go and gained meaningful employment. For this eight year old adulthood became a firstly series of intermittent employment and a long period of unemployment. Young people or those thirty five (35) years are often sidelined in many cases. These are usually seen in the areas of employment, entrepreneurial support, and a voice in decision making. Employers want persons with five (5) to ten (10) years' experience for entry level jobs and a degree for just a little over minimum wage. For those youths seemingly making it to the top of the chain with ease and seemingly listening ear often do so through either knowing those at the top through 'links' or an act of tokenism. In a capitalist world this is the norm. The same is true for the natural environment in which we live where the health and wellbeing of environment we live is only but second thought to us. We only think short term; we only remember the recent past.



*Fig. 1 Adrian Watson engaging the Minister of Finance on Economics and the environment*

As a youth advocate in Jamaica I have been a part of many initiatives in Jamaica that as sought to build the capacity of not only youth's but the general populous of Jamaica for both the short term and long term adaptation of a culture and a nation under threat. Case in point would be the Jamaica Rural Economy and Ecosystem Adapting to Climate Change (JaREEACH) which saw the execution of Climate Change Action Agent (CCAT) Programme for persons between the ages of 14 to 28 and the CEDAR (Communities Engaged to Drive Adaptation Responses) for those over the age of 28. For this programme I was enlisted to be a Climate Change Facilitator in May 2014 to help with the execution of the CCAT programme funded by USAID and executed by the Jamaica team from ACDI VOCA upon the granting of an extension into 2015. This Programm as of May 2014, had some 360 climate change action agents. According to the pre and post training tests, all groups recorded an overall 67-79% increase in awareness and 71%-84% change in

knowledge respectively, Ferguson1 and March 2014. Under this programme I have had the pleasure of interacting with fifty two (52) youths in two (2) Climate Change schools organized me and my co-facilitator under the programme. These groups were able to get training in climate change, project management and advocacy with the launching of their own micro-project supported by JaREEACH to help either their school or community adapt to climate change. Knox Community College CCAT which was my primary focus put together their proposal for a water harvesting system in 2015 to help the Agricultural Programme there become resilient to drought. This system will be there to benefit subsequent year groups at Knox Community College to be Environmental and Agricultural Programme to be less vulnerable to climate change where drought would stall their academic hands on learning. Old Harbour Bay Youth Coalition had their hands filled with equipping a primary school within their community with a solar system photovoltaic to help with the high cost of electricity that comes with carbon intensive power generation; especially in light of the fact that energy cost on Jamaica is extremely high. Old Harbour Bay Community and its environment is very highly prone to disasters such as storm surges, and is increasingly threatened by coastal erosion.



*Fig. 2 Engaging Old Harbour Bay Youth Coalition, Kimona Heights and Knox Community College on the JaREEACH Project.*

Most recently the government of Jamaica had proposed to establish a logistic hub within this particular community but faced a number of opposition from both residence and non-governmental organization like Caribbean Coastal Area Management (C-CAM) that works in the area to help maintain Portland Bight Protected Area that community is apart and Jamaica Environment Trust (JET). Apart of the stand against

the government's proposal The Jamaica Environment Trust (JET) organized a floatilla (boat parade around the Goat Islands with the protected area as a symbol of objection to the proposal. This event was support by me and the wider Caribbean Youth Environment Network Jamaica, Junior Chamber International Kingston contingent and other environmentalists.



*Fig. 3 Jamaica Environment Trust Floatilla Parade attended by CYEN Jamaica and other civil society groups*

Another case in point I have also participated in the Integrated Participatory Assessment Programme initiative funded by the American Red Cross and Executed by the Jamaican Red Cross to do research, which sought to assess two urban and two rural communities and the issues they face in light of social, environmental and economic needs. This geared towards providing open source information to both government agencies and other non-governmental organizations as well as the community members as to what the real priority areas are in each community. The communities were selected in the parishes St. James and St. Andrew with issues of sanitation, water, energy, disasters, unemployment and housing being the priority areas. For the rural community in the Mavis Bank area focused their priorities on landslides, hurricane, education, farming, adequate road infrastructure, and cost of transportation, garbage disposal and coffee production. For the Urban Community that is concentrated in the Portia Simpson Miller Square (better known as Three Miles) area they too had cited sanitation, education, employment, road infrastructure, hurricanes as key areas that needs to be addressed. These areas see dumping of garbage in natural and man-made gullies. These communities often suffer the consequences of being poor and marginalized with the consequences of a depressed ecosystem surrounding these areas. The Portia Simpson Miller Square is located close to Hunt's Bay where most of the refuse and garbage found in nearby gullies are washed. This has dire consequences for the marine animal life and mangrove trees location in the area. The conclusion can be had that environmental harm is not randomly distributed as those living in substandard conditions would not be able adequately dispose of garbage, and refuse

**Developed** countries need to cut their emissions, in collaboration with helping SIDs and other developing states to do the same and rebuild ecosystems in a sustainable way. There are some solution that can be taken and acted up in swift manner as seen below.

Social and Eco-Friendly Enterprises are the way to go. This is because they follow the triple bottom line approach- Financial, Social and environment. These enterprises reduce, reuse, and recycle as well as re-establishment eco-system and ecosystem services. Example of this type of businesses would be beekeeping industries in Jamaica active conserves bees that are dying off around the world due to pesticides and climate related degradation of the environment such as the logging of trees.

Beekeepers will actively go in and put in trees in the surrounding areas which is a way of reforesting the local to sequester carbon and re-establish habitats for endanger and endemic species and well as limit flooding in cities. Some first world cities like London, Ottawa, Winnipeg, New York City, Montreal, Vancouver, Chicago and Winnipeg just to name a few have taken up urban beekeeping as a way of becoming 'bee friendly' which means that they have to become environmentally friendly. This means that they have literally green there cities by putting in trees in their cities which increase the cities' urban forestry which means that the cities are sequestering some of the carbon they emit. This also had to the economy in a sustainable way has this provides a source of income for the urban beekeepers without the need to buy land. Organic farming has the potential to the same thing in both rural and urban spaces.

Organic farms are great as well. In effect, there needs to be more support in the area of grant funding to give these persons startup capital in SIDS to do these kinds of work especially as we have the least land mass compounded by the fact that we are the first to face the repercussion of the environmental response to climate change.

Energy reform in terms of its sources generation and usage needs to be looked at and reexamined. The world does not demand oil or carbon intensive sources, it demands energy. The world generates a large volume biological waste each year that could help with the generation of energy in the form of biodiesel. Advancement of the renewable energy in regards to solar energy has made strides in terms of developing new technologies and bringing down the cost of production and installation.

The economy, whilst being an artificial construct, needs to include the value of the ecosystem and the services that it brings to the table. Economic theories and practices can be used to enhance the re-establishment of ecosystems by finding a means to compensate those who provide them in their everyday operation whether through the activities that they do that have direct impact on the ecologies that surround them or indirect approaches to maintaining the ecosystems. These could range from but not limited to direct reforestation to close loop recycling systems.

Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) is not a new methodology but in recent times has been promoted has a viable way to help with building the resilience of communities, cities and countries to disasters and climate change. This method uses of biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of an overall adaptation strategy to help people to adapt to the adverse effects of environmental degradation, disasters and climate change. It is understood that no mechanism is 100 per cent full proof and seeks to

combine grey infrastructure with ecological/ green barriers to reduce the effects of disaster on the built and natural environment. Jamaica itself has finally taken on the particular methodology. In Jamaica's first move to take this on as a partnership with Mexico and El Salvador as joint applicants to execute a 5 year project entitled "Building climate resilience of urban systems through Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) in Latin America and the Caribbean" slated to finalized for full funding by the end of the calendar year 2015 for full roll out in 2016. The government has engaged a wide cross-section of Jamaica which included youth to select the sight and advise on and suggest the scope of work needed. The consulting team has manage write all suggestions made by me representing the youth cohort and those from other sectors. This is a big step in the way governance is executed.

In conclusion, the destruction of the environment is a manmade phenomenon in the name of accumulation of wealth. This exploitation of natural resources has seen the true victims of this destruction being those keystone species that have gone extinct, and the world's poor. It is clear that the global economy needs to reshape and reform itself in light of the fact that the environment does not need to give up any aspect of itself for the survival of the human species. This means the source of livelihood needs an almost complete reform. The world's system will need to take a look at how it earns and survive in a more sustainable in how it handles its natural resources. The over-consumption and exploitation of the earth's natural resources will see the quality of life for all living things on earth depreciate over time. Disaster will become more intense, temperatures and sea levels will rise, species extinction will increase, precipitation will become unpredictable with some places experience high rate of desertification, and health both ecosystem and humans will decline. With this in light actions need to be taken with a matter of urgency before the world's natural ecosystem reaches its tipping point.