



FARMERS RADIO IN JAMAICA - The Case of Jeffrey Town Farmers Association and JET FM

Jeffrey Town is a small rural community in the north eastern section of Jamaica situated 1600 feet above sea level approximately forty miles from the state capital, Kingston, it is a hilly farming district formerly famed for its banana production. Our climate is hot and damp with an average temperature of 30 degrees Celsius and rainfall of 80 inches per annum.

JTFA is a farming group- Jeffrey Town Farmers Association Limited, which was formed in 1991, twenty years ago, by a group of returning residents, (Jamaicans who had lived and worked overseas for many years), to help combat the demise of the banana industry. St Mary, the parish where JFTA is situated, coined the phrase "Green Gold" banana which was from approximately the early 1900s was the main stay of the community. Despite this Jeffrey Town has always suffered from underdevelopment: no running water and many of homes had no electricity. Even today there are no landline telephones for an area of three mile radius from the town square.

UNDP LIFE worked with the group from inception and continued to strengthen the members with training and

community needs assessment meetings which led to JTFA being registered as a limited company in 2003. The organization was instrumental in training the farmers to write a business plan including the first mission and vision statements and facilitated a partnership with ICT4D (a technology development agency in Jamaica). This is where the diversification took place. Agriculture and the environment remained the focus, but JTFA sought alternative means to attract young members to the group and by extension encourage them to become productive and where possible, to become farmers too.

The concept of establishing a multimedia centre was suggested to the group and within two years plans were well underway for the Jeffrey Town Multi media Centre which was opened officially in 2007. Ten members of the community received introductory training for multimedia meanwhile all sectors of the society came together to raise the basement of the JTFA building to house the centre on a parcel of land presented as a gift to the association for a community member.

The multimedia centre became the hub of the farmers association. Monthly meetings were held and training was offered to community members. JTFA incorporated is environmental activities into the operation by showing the farmers the activities carried out by the group using power

point presentations as well as adding environmental awareness training to every meeting. The activities included composting, terracing, gabion basket making and planting 11 acres of fruit trees in a two year project.

In 2008 the community prepared for the arrival and launch of another dynamic component to support the growth of community radio. This proved a difficult journey via the Jamaica Broadcasting Commission and for UNESCO which had to wait for our license to be granted in order to import the “radio in a box” equipment. JET FM; our call sign is an abbreviation of JEffrey Town FarMers with the slogan “The Voice from the Hills of St. Mary”. Recently the station added in an informal way, “powered by the sun” as it is the only radio station supported by a hybrid alternative energy system, containing both sun and wind solutions to ensure that it maximizes the options due to the mercurial nature of the weather in the hills.

The radio offered a new dimension to JTFA and new challenge, but what really to do with the radio and how to sustain it?

Partners from ICT4D helped set the direction by introducing CARIMAC personnel and the Commonwealth of Learning to the farmers association extended to include the youth component of the association. Over a

period of three years JTFA was led through a series of capacity building workshops firstly showing them how to schedule radio programmes; then how to structure a magazine show followed by specific training on how to produce and then edit content. The results have steadily improved in quality although the content has always been of significant quality.

The farmer's association is now empowered to promote its own green environment policy through meaningful programming made in the studios of JET FM: talking about areas including land degradation, climate change mitigation, composting and alternative energy to name a few. These titles are some of the subjects covered in our Global Warming Series of ten thirty minute programmes; each of the shows consists of a seven elements illuminated here:

- The narrator or host introduces each episode, links the segments together, reinforces where necessary and recaps to close each show.
- **Fact File** lasts four minutes and states the most interesting or relevant facts to the topic with its own back ground music to cement it as a feature within each show.
- **The Voice of the People** is a question that was asked of a series of members from the communities and the answers taped.

- **The discourse**; an interview with an expert; these experts varied from internationally famous authorities to local people with empirical knowledge of a specific event. This section was often coupled with local discussion groups.
- **Drama** is written as an independent feature with a set of characters in an imaginary town named after the radio station. Each episode elaborates on the show theme. This slot is the most popular feature within the community.
- **Music**. A popular theme song is chosen to reflect the message of the show and excerpts are played as introduction, exit and transition phases. An example is “96 degrees in the shade” by popular reggae group Third World.
- **Advertisement from the Voice for Climates Change series** supported by Panos Caribbean are specific messages selected to reinforce the theme: solar panels for the alternative energy show and car pooling for the conservation episode etc.

JET FM is focusing on these issues because they are the reality we face now, too much rain during the wet time and too much sun during the dry times, the farmers can no longer rely on the season. The station looks at problems and tries to offer local solutions to a pervasive world wide situation that seems to have selected our communities to show its tendrils in first. The station repeats this series and still finds that there is resonance from the listeners about the shows. The most

repeated comments are, "I didn't know you had to get permission from the council to bury your dead on family land," this relates to the Pollution issue and water seepage; "I didn't know how hurricane were made" from the Hurricane show relating preparedness tips and contributing factors and "When the lamp post tilt I just thought it wasn't put in good, I never knew it was a sign of land slide," from the Landslide show of particular relevance to us as our soil is clay based and prone to subsidence, erosion cracking and shifting in the dry time and of course landslide.

The Global Warming programming and others have led to greater recognition of the radio and by extension the community, this series linked with our complementary farming activities has led to honors for our environmental practices, environmental awareness, and youth leadership (Jamaica Environmental Trust 2010) and for our overall efforts at nation building within our community (BEST Community Competition 2009) and now for Innovations in Operation in Rural Development (CTA 2011) for our original radio programming content across a broad spectrum of issues affecting our daily lives.

JTFA is naturally proud of the awards. Members have all contributed voluntarily and feel validated for their efforts; they have served as a means of motivation. The organization is not able to offer evidence of the extent of community

change; the physical structures that have been maintained are doing well and have been seen to make significant mitigation contributions. However the necessary steps for sustainability have not been applied across the board and yet the listeners all relate academic knowledge of the correct of best practices.

It is our consider opinion that more collaborative training programmes including the wider community is the way to go. Informal research has found that when members of the community hear the voice of a neighbor or someone they personally know, they identify with the content more positively, they tell their friends and where possible make the change.