

CASE STUDY – INFORMATIONAL / PARTICIPATORYⁱ INNOVATION – JAMAICA

NAME OF INNOVATION: **TellYourMP (#TellYourMPjm)**

COUNTRY: **Jamaica**

YEAR: **2018/19**

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: In Jamaica, The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is money the Jamaican government sets aside that allows MP to fund discretionary development projects in their constituency. Members of Parliament (MPs) are required to hold CDF consultation meetings in their constituencies to help decide which projects to implement, but the face-2-face meetings are not always an easy way for everyone to participate in decision-making, and participation levels are typically low. **TellYourMPjm** is a pilot initiative in participatory budgeting that seeks to make the CDF consultations—*and public consultations in general*—more accessible for everyone, by using ICT to lower access barriers, broaden the base of participation and foster a more informed, engaged and active citizen participation. The technology platform and process is designed around the the 3 stages of the participatory budgeting process, in keeping with the Porto Alegre Model of Participatory Budgeting (1989): *Consultation -> Voting -> Monitoring*.

The TellYourMP pilot initiative is a collaboration between the constituency office of South East St. Andrew, the Caribbean Open Institute, a regional coalition supporting open development approaches to inclusion, participation and innovation; and the SlashRoots Foundation, a non-governmental organisation that seeks to improve how government interacts with citizens in this digital age.

ORIGIN: Prior research into Open Budgeting practices in Jamaica conducted in 2016ⁱⁱ, highlighted very low levels of knowledge, awareness or interest in the National Budget across citizen demographics. There was particularly high levels of disaffection/disconnect and lack of trust in the budget process by youth. The South-East St Andrew (SESA) constituency under MP Julian Robinson, has demonstrated a consistent level of citizen engagement in the CDF process, through traditional mechanisms of public consultation, project selection and annual reporting. MP Robinson, a former Minister of technology, has long been an advocate for transparency and citizen participation, and he and other key stakeholders within SESA have been receptive and open to new tools and processes. MP Robinson agreed to undertake the **TellYourMPjm** Pilot project in collaboration with the Caribbean Open Institute and Slashroots Foundation.

BUY-IN: This pilot innovation had significant support by the MP and constituency office, who provided a platform for introducing the concept at various consultation meetings in the constituency, and facilitated the active dialogue and engagement with Community-based Organizations. MP Robinson has also actively supported the social media outreach through his own website and social media channels.

EQUALITY OF PARTICIPATION: The **TellYourMPjm** Pilot is currently being implemented for one MP / Constituency. However, since it's launch, and following a presentation of initial problem discovery findings to a meeting of MPs, several have expressed strong interest in being considered for future expansion. Traditional CDF face-to-face consultation processes have generally had limited participation and reach. The goal of the project is to increase the reach and participation of citizens and engage new civic actors in the CDF process.

PRACTICE: The CDF, by law, mandates citizen consultation but is unspecific on its form. However, the success of these activities are being constrained by limited constituency resources, a clear strategy for achieving diverse and substantive dialogue, and limited usage of digital technologies. One of the primary goals of the Pilot is to create a toolkit, consisting of platform, tools, and processes, inclusive of online and offline consultation and mobilization tactics, that can support a cost-effective, digitally-enabled participatory budgeting model that is replicable across the Jamaican context.

IMPACT: The principal goal of the Pilot and subsequent scale-up initiatives, is increased citizen participation (quantity and diversity) and quality of contributions to the Constituency Development Fund budgeting process. In particular, underrepresented groups such as women’s associations and persons with disabilities will have new entry points to advocate for and influence investments in their community and for their constituents.

SUSTAINABILITY: The project will seek to secure the institutional adoption of the CDF Management board within the Office of Prime Minister to expand the adoption of participatory budgeting and the supporting tools to all constituencies. Increased adoption by MP and constituency officers, of the participatory methods, tools, and values established through TellYourMPjm, and strengthening the capacity of Members of Parliament to engage their constituents in an informed dialogue to guide CDF priorities, are key factors towards sustainability.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS/ISSUES:

1. Can the Technology Intervention?
 - Improve dissemination of information and more informed, engaged constituents
 - Increase the reach and participation of citizens
 - Engage new civic actors in the CDF process
 - Improve the fiscal efficiency / allocation of resources
 - Ultimately increase civic awareness, activism, responsibility
2. What is the most effective Role for CBOs (Community-Based Organizations)
 - Awareness, Outreach & Engagement?
 - Representation, aggregation, consolidation of inputs of Special interests
 - Project facilitation
 - Bridge / catalyst to increasing citizen digital literacy
3. How will the Pilot inform Digital Literacy strategies

ⁱ **Informational innovations** facilitate a more inclusive process of information gathering, so as to ensure that debates on a particular issue are directed by sufficient and high-quality information required to reach a legitimate decision.

Participatory innovations represent initiatives that seek to enable citizens to voice their views. Examining these innovations through the lens provided by experts on inclusion throws up interesting findings as to the conditions under which these innovations can be used to maximum effect.

Informational and *participatory* innovations require some degree of political buy-in yet will heavily rely on staff commitment and expertise if they are avoid superficiality. They are the innovations that international actors are most likely to be able to influence, as they are innovations that require significant administrative support and expertise.

ⁱⁱ Minto-Coy, I., Roberts, L., Hall, B. and McNaughton, M. (2016) 'Towards Greater Citizen Engagement and Transparency Through Open Budgeting in Jamaica', in 2016 Open Data Research Symposium. Madrid, Spain. Madrid, Spain. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4TpC6ecmrM7S0NlaS1zWENjdlU/view>.