

## Participatory Planning in East Port of Spain

### Outline

The East Port of Spain participatory planning exercise is a case study that demonstrates some of the positive aspects of a globalizing world system. It shows how international networking by local actors brought not just external technical input, but also resources and credibility to attempts to reform the planning and urban management system from the level of affected communities.

The case study is about an ongoing exercise with three components: (a) East Port of Spain participatory planning (b) Greater Port of Spain Local Area Plan and (c) UMP Waste Management Plan. Two of these along with the major national planning reform are in limbo but there has been enough momentum to suggest that the overall initiative will lead to greater public participation by low income communities in the planning and urban management of East Port of Spain.

The case study begins with a brief discussion of some of the conceptual issues and comparative international experience in participatory planning. This is followed by an overview of the context of East Port of Spain. The details of the case study are then presented followed by an examination of technical, human, financial and institutional resources. The concluding section discusses the influence of globalization.

### Participatory Planning and Urban Management

Urban planning and management has evolved tremendously since its 19<sup>th</sup> century European roots in master planning. Master planning built around a vision of utopian society which was the norm up to World War II evolved into the comprehensive approach to planning based upon the rational method and facilitated by Systems Theory and Cybernetics (Hall, 1996). This predominantly technical and top down form was broadened by the social revolutions of the sixties in Europe and North America to include elements of advocacy and participation (Friedman, 1992).

In the North Atlantic, there have been thirty odd years of institutionalized participatory planning. It has now become a legal requirement for comprehensive consultation in most aspects of urban planning and management. Yet there are many criticisms of the process of participation.

The essence of most of the criticisms are that the needs of the poorer segments of the society do not have the same weight as the rich and powerful and there is continuing and worsening socio-spatial segregation of cities. Many of the early concerns of the classic criticism of public participation in planning by Arnstein (1969) are echoed in contemporary literature. Her ladder of public participation which suggests that most forms of participation do not passively meet their objectives and are often actively manipulated by public and private interests to achieve quite the opposite remains a current theme.

The critics of public policy in addressing social problems in first world cities such as Castells (1980) have suggested that it only by action that threatens the stability of the social order that vulnerable groups are able to have their problems addressed. Another recurrent theme is the validity of the concept of the "public good" that planners and planning are supposed to represent, and the extent to which planning as a neutral scientific process can represent this good (Wolfe 2000). Forester (1989) and Hibbard and Laurie (2000) suggest that even when planners seek a higher public interest and the needs of the powerless in society they must almost function as guerrillas in the system. Some writers have become skeptical that either the market or the state can meaningfully address the needs of the poor and they must depend on themselves, community action and community institutions (Green and Haines 2002).

### Participatory Planning in the Third World

Wolfe (2002) categorizes four existing types of planning (a) comprehensive (b) strategic (c) action and (d) self-reliant. The latter three are focussed on participatory

methodologies and have been widely pursued in the Third World especially by development and aid agencies.

Table 1 adapted from Mohammed and Frank (2000) in developing a methodology for the East Port of Spain exercise describe two popular types of planning in the Third World that also forms part of the self-reliant category. The Participatory Rural Appraisal PRA technique while developed for rural application has been modified for urban contexts and the Assets Based/Capacity Focused planning. Both forms demonstrate attempts to engage the community from assessments of the problem to developing the capacity to address them. The Assets Based Model, however, has the ability to focus on what the community can do which is both positive in that it has elements of self-reliance, but negative in that it cannot address broader socio-economic limitation and city-wide problems.

Table 1: Self Reliant/ International Models of Participatory Planning

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)		Assets Based/Capacity-Focused Planning
Key Elements	Creative approach to information sharing; Listening and learning through shared field experiences with people in their own settings; Methods employed include visual analysis (mapping, model building, drawing), Venn diagrams, and methods for interviewing and sampling.	Document what currently exists in the community (inventory); Identify opportunities; Identify options for projects and programmes; Set realistic goals; Ascertain benefits and drawbacks of each option; Create linkages and bonds between individuals and organizations in the community sustainable
Positive Elements	Enabling; engages all interested stakeholders; flexible; low-cost; based on consensus	Empowering communities; places value on a community's assets and capabilities; Break cycle of dependence on outside agencies
Drawbacks	Professionals in charge of consultation may tend to dominate; consensus is often difficult to reach; resolving conflict is often difficult	Consensus can be difficult to achieve; inventory process can be time consuming; personal information of community residents has potential to be misused

### Implementing Participatory Planning

Whilst in comprehensive planning and most forms of official planning in the third world low income stakeholders get involved after alternative development proposals have been generated in the empowering and self-reliant models they are involved at all stages. This includes problem analysis/indication; development of alternative solutions, implementation and evaluation and monitoring.

The higher the participatory mode the earlier on and more involved are the initial aspects of the data collection and problem analysis Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and participatory action research (PAR) have been some of the techniques utilized primarily by the international development community. Care is taken in the design and implementation of this appraisal technique to minimize external or expert views. The community asset model which is one of the self-reliance models is based first upon identification of the resources and capacities of the community to address their problems even before addressing the problems.

A key problem is the focus of the analysis and problem definition. Once given free reign, every community problem even those seen to be going beyond the capacity of the planning exercise is enumerated from infrastructure and employment to personal problems. The challenge to this process is the balance between technical inputs and community expression. Common techniques used to give effect to the process include the community walk about, mapping and establishment of the spatial boundaries of the problem and setting priorities.

**Participatory Implementation:** Participation “fatigue” has become common-place amongst many low income communities as they participate in surveys, workshops meetings, charettes and all the new participatory tools that can lead nowhere. The early identification of small projects for implementation has become a useful tool to verify the positive nature of the process and purchase much needed credibility. Community participation in the implementation generally, both in some monitoring function and as direct actors in the process is expected to serve both meaningful participation build capacity for future involvement. Ultimately, meaningful democratization of both plans and implementation requires some decentralization of both the ability to collect revenues and to budget and spend them at the local level. The specific experiences of participatory budgeting are an important area that has received some prominence. Participatory budgeting has been used to involve communities directly in the programming of capital works programmes in their communities. They are allowed to propose projects, prioritize and select the actual projects and monitor the performance of the programme of implementation. Whilst the actual percentage of overall municipal budgets remain small, participatory budgeting directly involves the urban poor in the planning and implementation of key urban infrastructure and services (Souza 2002).

**Participatory Monitory/Evaluation:** Assessing if the objectives of the community are being met during implementation is a key issues to the success of any participatory planning exercise. Participatory monitory and evaluation mechanics help to ensure that this is done during the implementation and in post project evaluation. Realistic evaluation can help justify further participation by the community even if all their objectives were not met. An important risk of participation in the management of implementation by the community is that their inputs are marginal and their efforts constitute a cooption of the community’s capability where a historic struggle has taken place to achieve participation. Cooption and neutralization can be an actual strategy of a top-down planning and urban management system. Thus community control of the process is an ultimate goal of many participatory planning efforts by community activists.

### **International Lessons**

Evans (2002) suggests that with all its limitations the state at different levels remains the key partner to overcome structural, large-scale socio-economic and market problems which are the basis of urban inequality. He further suggests that in bringing about meaningful change communities can benefit from relationships with national and international NGOs and international activists’ movements.

Participatory planning is limited in its capacity to transform the urban fabric and its socio-economic structure. Its most effective forms tend to limit the scale of activity and the level of change. Broad-based urban problems such as socio-spatial segregation which requires reform of the residential market for housing and the provision of infrastructure and social services require the involvement of the state and politics.

However, it seems that the gains from empowering and self-reliant planning can help galvanize community effort in engaging the necessary actors and agencies to initiate the process of change. It does seem that community activism and engaging of the politics of power that demonstrates the possibility of violence such as urban riots can more rapidly accelerate the process than any well-meaning top-down participatory planning exercise.

### The East Port of Spain Environment

Port of Spain is the capital city of Trinidad and Tobago. East Port-of-Spain is that part of the city east of the St. Ann's River and is also commonly referred to as the East Dry River (EDR). East Port of Spain includes areas within the City of Port of Spain as well other areas under the administration of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation and stretches from the eastern edge of the Port of Spain Central Business District eastward through the Laventille Hills to Morvant, Figure 1 shows the relationship of East Port of Spain to formal Port of Spain.

**Figure 1: Administrative Boundary of the City of Port of Spain and East Port of Spain**



East Port-of-Spain is rugged with a greater part of the area composed of ridges and basins of the Laventille Hills. With the exception of Sea Lots, which lies at the mouth of the St. Ann's River and parts of Belmont, settlement is on slopes and ridges. Eighteen and one half percent (18½%) have slopes of less than 1:20 which can be developed at high density at relatively low cost, while over sixty (60) percent of the area consists of slopes with gradients of over 1:6, (normally considered too steep for development). Despite this the area is densely populated.

Today the most common business enterprise are small shops that serve mainly residents. Unemployment for these areas continues to be high. The Unemployment figure for the whole of the City is 10% (CSO, 2000) and although figures specific for East Port-of-Spain are not yet available the rate could be as much as 20%.

The quality of infrastructure is variable within East Port-of-Spain. Gonzales for example is a planned development so although the terrain is quite hilly and the roads narrow, they are for the most part paved and adequately maintained. The parts of Gonzales that are unplanned (the higher ridges) are un-sewered and there is no pipe borne water except by way of "stand pipes" (community taps located at the side of the road).

Laventille is largely unplanned and access is via a mixture of paved roads, unpaved tracks and steep steps. The only parts of Laventille that are sewerred are those parallel to the Eastern Main Road, one of the major arterials running east to west at the foothills of the Northern Range. Water supply is also inadequate.

Sea Lots is a squatter settlement that can easily be described as the worst in East Port of Spain with poor drainage and no infrastructure for sewerage or pipe borne water. The paucity of access to these areas as a result of the steep, narrow roads and the absence of roads in some cases have seriously affected provision of services, solid waste collection being one such service.

The Re-development Plan for Port of Spain (1973) mentions the overall inadequacy of educational, community, health and recreational facilities. Since then there has been the

construction of a multi-purpose sporting facility in the area, new primary and secondary schools and the refurbishment of health centres but a shortfall in these facilities still exists. There is a serious lack of community centres and the majority of those that do exist are in need of serious repair.

Despite the many constraints faced by the people in this area, it has suggested by many that the people of East Port-of-Spain are themselves the most significant asset to any community development initiative or community planning process. Through their community groups, church groups and cultural institutions the residents continuously demonstrate a keen understanding of the issues facing their communities and a fervent desire to improve their situation. Unfortunately due to the frustrations of voiceless-ness the residents are well known for their many protests regarding the sub-standard infrastructure that they have endured.

### **History of the Case Study Programme**

The overall case study was an attempt to develop a multifaceted approach to engendering participatory planning in Trinidad and Tobago, by initiating pilot type participatory and partnership planning in East Port of Spain. While the initiating agency was the Central Government Agency (INPPC) charged with reform and devolution of the national planning system, the partners were the City of Port of Spain, the San Juan Laventille Corporation and the communities of East Port of Spain. Other partners involved were international, technical and funding agencies such as, the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and the Urban Management Programme (UMP) of the United Nations.

The main focus of the process was to engender greater public involvement and transparency though in all three components of the case study issues identification, strategic planning and visioning, improving sectoral coordination and creating partnerships between government, business and non-governmental organizations for urban revitalization were included. It is important to note that the focus has been on revitalization, and not wholesale redevelopment, and that greater effort has been put toward building upon strengths rather than simply identifying weaknesses. The approach involved five key elements:

1. Overcoming the historical legacy of top-down planning;
2. Learning from international and comparative experiences;
3. Experimentation and innovation;
4. Working with key stakeholders; and
5. Reforming the existing framework

The key areas for reform included addressing the human, financial, technical and institutional resource for planning and implementation at the central government level, at the municipalities and in the communities. The exercise in the study area will be examined under these headings after a more detailed analysis of the components of the case study.

### **The East Port of Spain Participatory Planning Exercise**

This activity was initiated by the Interim National Physical Planning Commission (INPPC) and there were five components to the exercise over its two-year period. The first component was the Urban Revitalization Council which was a multi-stakeholder group created to address the lack of coordination that exists among government agencies working in East POS. It was a forum designed to ensure that key stakeholders were given the opportunity to be involved at the decision-making level. It attempted to involve key planning agencies, different levels of government, the community and other parts of civil society.

The second component was the creation of the Community Leaders Committee, which evolved out of an effort to organize community groups into a system of networking committees. Past surveys done in the area always cited poor community organization as a hindrance to the area's social and economic development. One very strong networking committee, the Success/ Laventille Networking Committee already existed and comprised several independent community groups. This pattern of organization was encouraged in other areas of East Port of Spain.

Community Workshops were the third component. The objectives of the workshops were two-fold. Firstly they provided a means to educate the community as to the scope, role, function, and relevance of planning and secondly it was hoped that the process would allow community leaders to emerge based upon their willingness to participate in the process. A total of six workshops were held through out East Port of Spain. In the workshops a process of planning for the communities by the communities were initiated. These workshops initiated community mapping exercises and problem identification. It was expected that these workshops would be followed by an ongoing community planning exercise.

Pilot Projects, the fourth component were envisaged as a means to empower communities by affording them the opportunity to increase their skill in decision-making. The community was to perform a needs assessment and then to prioritize these needs. With the assistance of the INPPC a project was then to be selected and budgeted for implementation. This phase in the process was only partly realized due to problems in funding but it did show the willingness of some planning authorities to address issues of implementation.

The fifth component was the setting up of the East Port-of-Spain Community Planning Center. This office was a physical representation of central government's commitment to the inclusion of communities in the decision-making process as it impacts upon their communities. It was to be an information center to exchange information among the government, NGOs and the community at large. It was also to become a place where the community leaders committee could conduct their meetings. The office was officially opened in January 2002 but has recently been made inactive due to a lack of funds.

Initial Evaluation: A very preliminary evaluation of the process conducted by the INPPC to date, cited the following observations as challenges that contributed to the premature termination of the exercise. The process was starved of financial and human resources. There were no budgetary allocations for the exercise, which the INPPC attempted to finance from its own operating expenses account and external projects such as this CIP/CIDA project. In terms of human resources the entire process was dependent on the efforts of planning interns from the Canadian Institute of Planners, student planners from the Masters Program in Planning and Development of the University of the West Indies, and the honorary staff of the Interim National Physical Planning Commission (INPPC).

Sustaining the involvement of the politicians and planners in the process as well as gaining the support of the bureaucracy, that is, those who controlled the finances did not occur. Both local government bodies responsible for East Port of Spain that is, the Port of Spain Corporation and the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation never fully participated in the process therefore the process lacked political and administrative support.

From early on it was evident that the main strength of the project was the energy of the various communities. It will be up to the Revitalization Council, INPPC, TCPD and other government agencies to match this energy with logistical, technical and financial support to ensure that the process retains momentum.

### **Participation in the Development of the 2002 Greater Port of Spain Development Plan**

Apart from the community based planning that was being pursued by the INPPC they were also responsible for quality assurance and public consultation on a series of formal planning exercise being conducted by the Urban Development Company on behalf of the Government. These plans were being conducted by the foreign consultants- led team and were largely done in the top- down approach. Attempts were made to integrate as much public participation as possible to complement the ongoing participatory planning exercises.

At the first stage of the process, which was originally under the control of the INPPC and was being conducted by local consultants a key stakeholder consultant process was a requirement in scoping exercises to determine the issues to be addressed in the plan. The next stage involved plan development, which for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago was being done by private consultants. Again consultants were required by the INPPC to include key stakeholder consultations during the process of plan development not after. In the

making of the Draft Plan for Waterfront Port of Spain for example Sea Lots community, which was the only settlement affected, were brought in into the picture at an early stage.

In the second phase of the process, which was conducted by foreign consultants, the process of early and widespread consultation and participation by affected communities was much more difficult to attain primarily because of the very tight schedules associated with the project. There were some attempts but not meaningful to achieve the input of East Port of Spain community in the concept plan for Port of Spain, 1999.

By the time the Development Plan for East Port of Spain was initiated in 2002 via a UDeCOTT (Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago) contract, the East Port of Spain participatory planning Exercise had been initiated by the INPPC and both the objectives and process of the two exercises appeared contradictory.

The INPPC was in a real dilemma as trying to integrate the speed being required by the government to come up with plans and the Government's preferred method of procurement via foreign contracts and the requirements of meaningful participatory planning. The process development for consultation on the 2001 draft plan for Port of Spain was still consultation and not participatory planning but it pushed forward the frontiers of this approach.

**Methods Used to Involve the Community:** While a public consultation process was mandated by the Town and Country Planning Act (35:01). It has historically been conducted limited circulation of the near complete document to key stakeholders and a public hearing during the course of one day. This allowed meaningful participation by the select few who could fathom a technical document normally at a very abstract level. Even meaningful comment would lead to little change in the draft document. In address this crisis, an experienced NGO (the Trinidad and Tobago Citizens Agenda Network) was hired to undertake the exercises and develop a framework to maximise participation. They utilized a three-day process to bring together technical expertise, elected representatives from the three municipalities, which make up Greater Port of Spain, community groups, environmental, heritage and special interest NGOs and CBOs, business Government Agencies and other stakeholders. In all, some 125 stakeholder groups participated. The process had three components.

- i. Training on facilitation by technical resource people involved;
- ii. A whole day dialogue based upon technical presentations, workshop and plenary sessions based on issues;
- iii. A whole day dialogue of a similar nature but focused on spatial sub-areas within the larger planning area.

The Draft Plan was revised based upon the process and a supplement published in the newspapers highlighting the product. This was then discussed in a public forum before the final draft was produced. There were however, limitations on the methods of implementing the planning proposals.

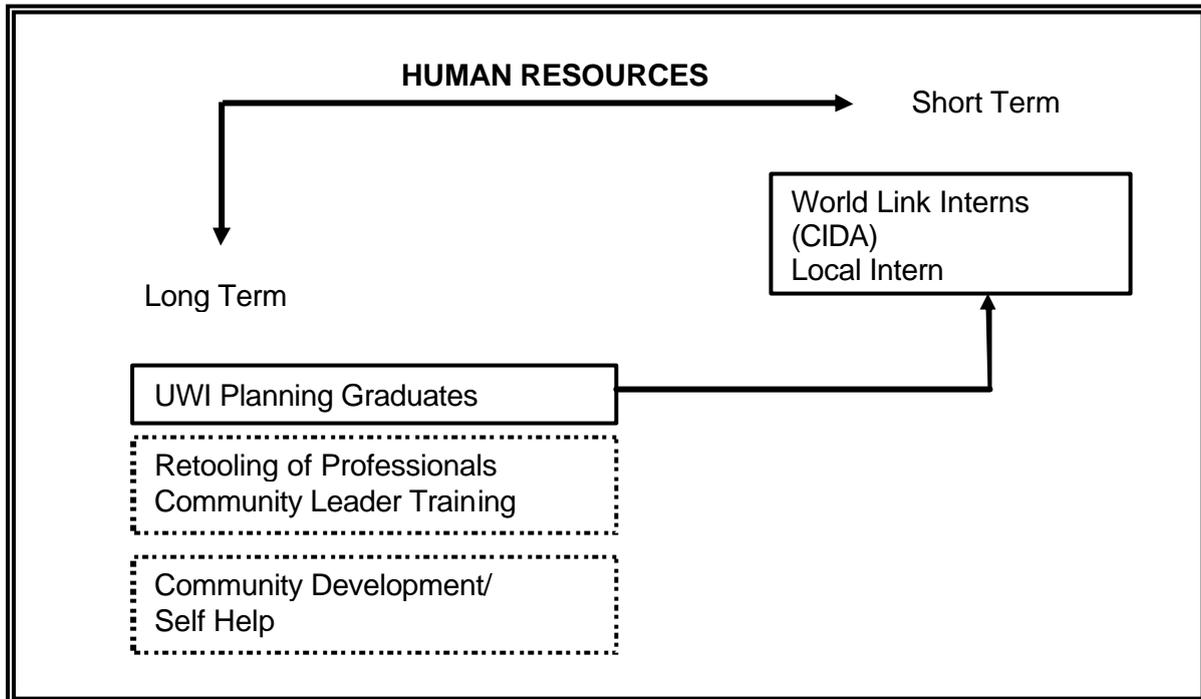
**Initial Evaluation:** The normal limitations that have prevented previous plan-making exercises from becoming statutory or legal plans and being implemented as previously described existed for this one. Additional impediments were, however, a change of administration and stalling of the process of planning reform, by objectives of which were devolution of planning and its better linkage to implementation.

### **Analysis of the Case Study Approaches**

**Human Resources:** With no history or limited experiences in the local public sector agencies for planning or the professional planning community new approaches to develop the relevant human resources was necessary. For a range of reasons the local professional membership organization, the Trinidad and Tobago Society of Planners (TTSP) did not participate in a programme in which they were initially involved. Two reasons given unofficially were that Trinidad's planning was not yet ready for such types of planning and the membership was generally not interested in the project. This however, meant that most of the experience available locally was not participating in the case project.

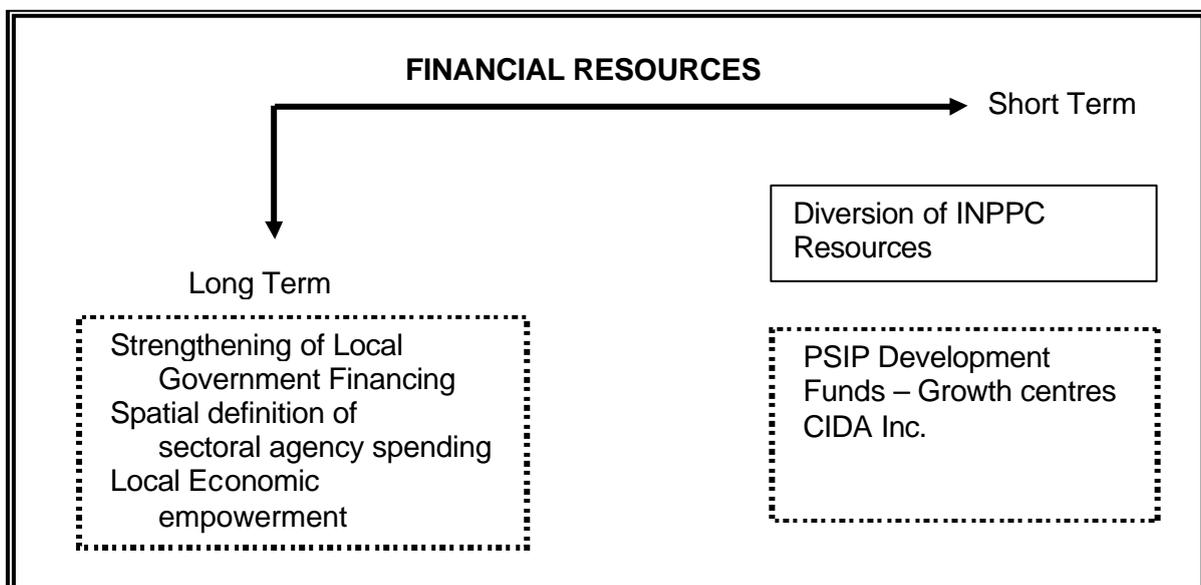
Figure 2 Human Resources indicate the type of resource development that was initiated via the University of the West Indies and the external partners CIP/CIDA. The UMP would later provide technical inputs at both the municipal and community levels. The dotted boxes indicate two levels of human resources development that may come from this CIDA project or similar projects.

Figure 2: Human Resources



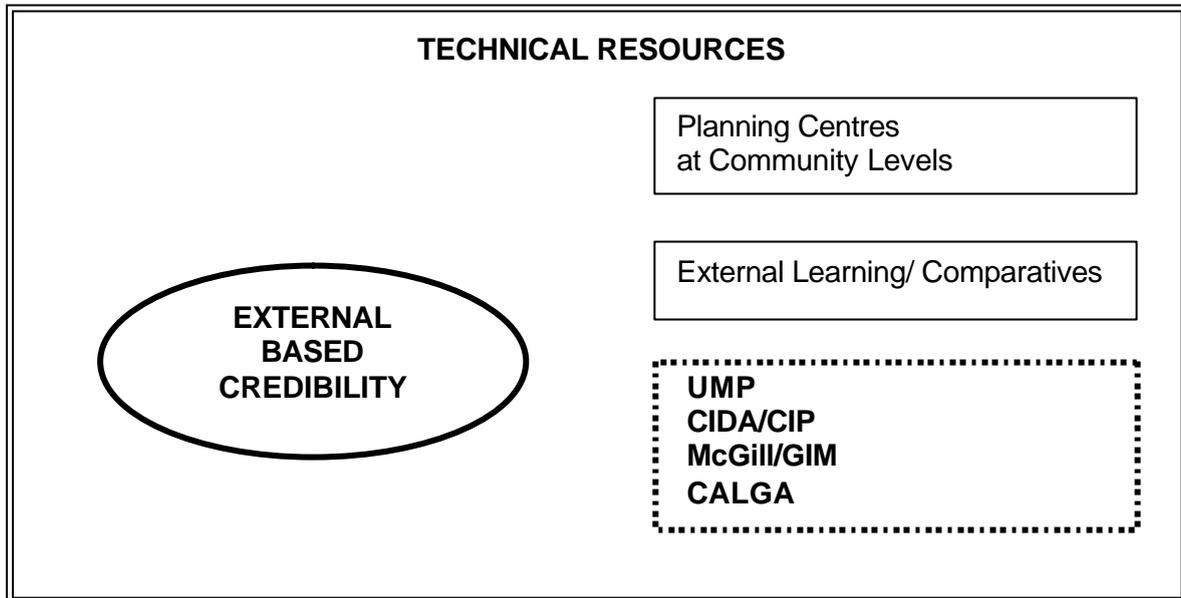
Financial Resources: A range of short-term and long term resources were mobilized to make the process of participatory planning possible. Figure 3 indicates the range of options. As the dotted lines indicate, most were not actually mobilised during the life of the case study but these actions were initiated.

Figure 3: Financial Resources



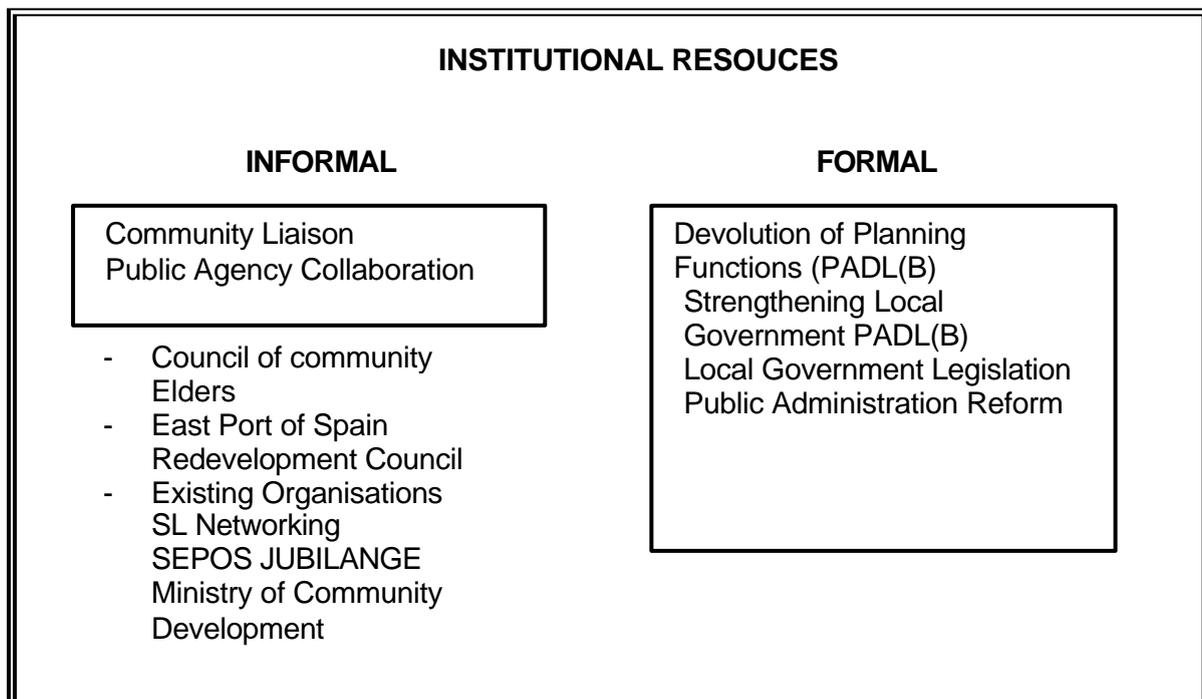
Technical Resources: The technical resources for initiating the case project in its various forms and helping to develop participatory planning in a sustainable manner are depicted in Figure 4 Technical Resources. External resources were and still are key not just for their specific capabilities but also to provide externally based credibility needed to overcome local inertia and opposition to greater devolution, transparency and accountability.

Figure 4: Technical Resources



Institutional Resources: Figure 5 includes both the statutory and administrative resources needed to be addressed. Some of these were initiated within the overall case study but much had to be done by the wider reform of the planning systems which is now stalled.

Figure 5: Institutional Resources



### **UMP City Consultation**

The INPPC was involved with the UMP programme through the membership of the Commission. It initiated a dialogue with the City of Port-of-Spain to determine their interest in participating in a City Consultation Exercise under the Auspices of the UMP. This was seen as a mechanism to broaden the resource base for participatory planning exercises by bringing external funding and expertise, which was limited at both the INPPC and the City Corporation. Most of all it was hoped that this would bring external support to help overcome historical and bureaucratic cynicism on participatory planning by both the Planning Profession and the Central Government Planning Agency, the Town & Country Planning Division.

The UMP was seen as a potential model to bring both expertise and credibility to consultative processes in city management and participatory urban planning and management. It was to aid in dialogue and cooperation between central government and agencies, local government and the communities

East Port-of-Spain was selected as the pilot for the development of a participatory solid waste management plan for two reasons; firstly the gravity of the solid waste problem in that area; and secondly because of the groundwork already initiated by the INPPC among community-based organizations in the area.

**Methodology:** The specific methodology to be employed was the city consultations procedure, which had been utilized by the UMP throughout the Latin American Region and other parts of the world. This included

- a - Pre-Process (Analysis and Context document)
- b - Base line Study (Including resident awareness survey)
- c - Community Activities
- d - Consultation/Participatory training
- e - Documentation/Workshop
- f - Evaluation

The method of implementation of the proposals is by developing a city partnership committed to the proposals of a City Action Plan. The partners would include local and national government, communities and the private sector. There is also an inter-actor agreement AP which details the commitments and roles of each stakeholder. The Action Plan is to lead to a detailed Priority Action Plan supported by the UMP and other technical stakeholder in the society.

In this particular case the stakeholders involved the city of Port of Spain, the national agency responsible for solid waste management, the Solid Waste Management Company (SWMCOL), a national planning agency, the INPPC, the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, the three pilot communities and the University of the West Indies. A close working relationship was also established with the city department responsible for waste management.

In the development of the participatory solid waste management plan the POS Corporation selected for the study area only that part of East Port-of-Spain that lies within the boundaries of the city of Port-of-Spain, an area approximately 843 acres, stretching from Belmont to Sea Lots. Three pilot communities were chosen to participate in the process. These were Sea Lots, Gonzales and Laventille (Figure 1).

**Initial Evaluation:** The Process took place around and just after a change of Government. Unfortunately, the political party groups re-emerged in the process and their leadership became strong. An attempt was made to downplay this element and focus upon the process for the City Committee. The international experience of the UMP greatly facilitated in the organization and this problem did not negatively affect the process of participation as much as was expected.

The city administration was fully behind the process of community participation as it seemed in keeping with international trends in municipal management. There is now a

widespread enthusiasm for various forms of community partnership and participation in municipal management and there is also discussion of participatory budgeting and management in the Visioning for the City and other municipalities in the country.

Their efforts have helped to establish working partnership between various levels of government, the community, the university and international agencies. One indirect outcome was the eminent establishment of the Regional Programme Office of the UMP in Port of Spain. There is also an action plan for participatory waste management in East Port of Spain in which many stakeholders have agreed to participate.

There were two significant outputs of the exercise (i) there was distrust from the communities about the planning process but it was apparently not clouded by issues of political affiliation (and race) and (ii) the local government bodies were partially involved. The exercise was seen as many in the Port of Spain and National Community as a real step forward in changing the formal, top-down plan-making process.

### Conclusion

Some important first lessons to be learned from this process are: 1) There exists a history of government inaction in the area, which has in part created a great deal of mistrust of the Ministry of Housing/Town & Country Planning Division within the communities of East Port-of-Spain. 2) There are many initiatives operating in the area, yet most are doing so in isolation of the others. Better coordination is imperative. 3) There have been several studies conducted over the years; from socio-economic studies to land-use and building inventories, yet little implementation of any recommendations. The implementation side of this process will prove to be very important, particularly to re-build trust and bring various stakeholders into the process. 4) The level of distrust of the communities to the planning process was so deep that the event could not get above these issues. In a way this was certainly behind the real evolution of participation and capability that had developed in the community groups and NGOs. 5) The ability of individual planners within the INPPC to network with the international donor agencies and the multilateral provided resources, but more importantly the technical credibility to pursue reforms not popular amongst the local planning profession at the time.

It is noteworthy that the key initiative now being pursued is being driven by the UMP. Local professionals not previously willing to participate in locally initiated reform are now willing to do so.

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