

ABSTRACT

Empowerment as a Catalyst to Stimulating Social and Economic Development at the Community Level

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The notion of empowerment as a mechanism for advancing the concept of development in local communities has become a much-debated issue especially among intellectuals and political directorates especially in so-called Third World countries, not least among them Jamaica.

In this thesis, an attempt is made to show that people at the grassroots level are not only

interested but would be keen on making a contribution towards public policy decisions, especially those that will have either negative or positive consequences for them as individuals. The paper contends that by giving a voice to individual communities, development on a national scale will move at a more rapid and steady pace. If people believe they are an integral part of the process of development, it will be easier to enlist their support and co-operation in ensuring that developmental proposals envisaged by the government not only come to fruition, but are also speeded up.

The analysis is based on a questionnaire survey carried out in the squatter community of Leith Hall in St. Thomas to test the level of interest of those residents in participating in local governance, and is based on Esman's thesis of development from below and Friedman's concept of alternative development. The findings illustrate the thinking of typical individuals towards the basic philosophy of a participatory democracy, as well as highlight the political representatives' own deficiencies and makes a stronger case for instituting realistic reforms which would see the people taking a more active role in public policy decisions that affect their lives in one way or another.

Keywords: McPherse Matthew Thompson: empowerment and participation; Esman's development from below; Friedman's alternative development.