

ABSTRACT

Structural Adjustment and the Middle Class: A Case Study of a Jamaican Community

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Structural adjustment policies in Jamaica have brought with them a number of changes. They have, to some extent, succeeded in expanding the sphere of entrepreneurial activities in Jamaica, enriching some members of the society, while pauperising others. Other members have managed to maintain their socio-economic position. Within the middle class, the effect of this has been a change in its composition to include new members. These new members have been described as the 'newly emerging middle class.'

In this thesis, empirical studies of the newly composed middle class were conducted with a view to finding out the strategies devised to deal with changes associated with structural adjustment policies. The areas examined included consumption, savings and investment, employment and housing. Perceptions of the role of education have also been examined to find out to what extent views on this traditionally important marker of middle class status has changed.

This analysis shows that there have been important changes associated with structural adjustment with respect to the middle class. This has particularly been the case with employment and housing, and less so with household consumption and savings and investment. The study also demonstrates that changes within the structure of this group have the potential to result in modifications to traditional perceptions of middle class status, values and norms. With respect to education, greater worth now seems to be placed on its utilitarian rather than on its status value.

One conclusion of this study is that neglect of the social sector, which has been associated with structural adjustment policies in Jamaica, has resulted in relatively low levels of education, qualification and training of the middle class labour force. This, it is felt has acted as an obstacle to the optimal development of entrepreneurial activities and the private sector.