

#BuildBackBetterTogether - Exploring Government and citizen partnership in Jamaica's COVID-19 recovery

Governments around the world are grappling with the ongoing public health, economic and psychological damage from the COVID-19 pandemic. The compound nature of the pandemic has required governments to develop and deploy new capabilities under constraints of great uncertainty and significant pressure. Creating space for learning and reflection in this context is a challenging, but necessary, part of mounting an effective response.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP)¹ has sought to address this challenge by documenting the trends and practices emerging among its member countries, and facilitating knowledge sharing. Arising from this discourse is strong evidence affirming that the most successful government responses have employed openness—transparency, accountability and participation—as a core implementing principle. Openness manifests in modalities ranging from clear and effective risk communication and community engagement; transparency in the implementation of fiscal stimulus and the process for accessing social safety nets; and at times, humility when new information or mistakes result in a change to strategy. The terms that have emerged in the OGP community to describe these practices are “Open Recovery” and “Open Response”.²

Open Recovery and Open Response are approaches to emergency response that place transparency, accountability and participation at the centre of COVID-19 containment, provision of emergency response, and medium-term government efforts to rebuild in the wake of the pandemic. The Jamaican Government has implemented many open approaches in its COVID-19 response. These include the regular press briefings by the Prime Minister and Ministry of Health, transparent implementation and communication surrounding the COVID-19 Allocation of Resources for Employees (CARE) Programme, and the establishment of public-private working groups (“task forces”) to examine the re-opening of the economy.

To create an opportunity for reflection and knowledge sharing, the OGP Jamaica Civil Society Working Group will be hosting a #BuildingBackBetterTogether webinar and discussion on Open Recovery + Response. The topics to be discussed include:

- Innovative Open Recovery + Response activities being implemented across the globe and early lessons from these experiences.
- How the GOJ has used openness in its own approach to COVID-19.
- Existing and upcoming entry points for citizens to contribute to or participate in Jamaica's COVID-19 response, and exploring the areas that we can strengthen

¹ The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from national and sub-national governments to promote open government, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. Jamaica joined the OGP in December 2016.

² <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/campaigns/open-response-open-recovery/>

The event will also aim to highlight potential new areas for collaboration between the GOJ and civil society and possible future initiatives that could be included as commitments in Jamaica's OGP National Action Plan, which is scheduled for completion by June 2021.

Proposed Agenda

1. Context Setting - Why does Open Recovery/Response matter?

- How does Open Recovery + Response strengthen COVID-19 response measures?
- What lessons are emerging in other countries deploying Open Response + Recovery?

2. Transparency & Openness in Jamaica's COVID-19 Response

- How has GOJ employed openness in its COVID-19 response approach?
- What are we learning and where are the challenges?

3. Where are the opportunities for citizens to get involved in Jamaica's COVID-19 recovery?

- How can the GOJ and the general public collaborate to #BuildBackBetterTogether

Target Speakers

1. Dr. Nigel Clarke, Minister, Ministry of Finance (Or appointed representative)

- Contribution: Reflections on the GOJ's ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery plans and the government's efforts to collaboration with stakeholder groups and the general public
- Status: To be invited

2. Sanjay Pradhan, Chief Executive Officer, Open Government Partnership

- Contribution: Speak to emerging global context on Open Response & Open Recovery.
- Status: Tentatively Confirmed

3. Francesco De Simeone, IDB

- Contribution: IDB/MOF Public Investment Map initiative and transparency in government and opportunity for the public to engage with capital expenditure in their communities.
- Status: Verbal confirmation. To be formally invited

4. Representative from the COVID-19 Task Force

- Contribution: Can speak to considerations/recommendations for how Jamaica is approaching COVID-19 recovery and potentially respond to where citizen participation fits within the approach.
- Suggestion:
 - Nadine Spence - Gender activist
 - Professor Alwyn Wint - Member of the National Partnership Mechanism

5. Jeanette Calder, Jamaica Accountability Meter Portal

- Contribution: Civil society representative focused on government transparency and accountability.
- Status: To be invited

About The OGP Jamaica Civil Society Working Group

In late 2018, the civil society organisations Jamaicans For Justice, the SlashRoots Foundation, Jamaica Environment Trust, the World Resources Institute and other individual members of civil society began meeting to discuss how civil society could support Jamaica's OGP process. The resulting Working Group has met with GOJ stakeholders with responsibilities for Open Government related activities, multilateral partners who could support National Action Plan development by the GOJ, as well as representatives of the OGP Latin America Secretariat to build support for Jamaica's participation in the OGP. The Working Group continues to provide catalytic support to the OGP process as a means of advancing open government initiatives in Jamaica.