

A Storm called Erika: Lessons from a service-learning, community-based psychosocial support post disaster response

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The Caribbean, with an estimated population of 37.5 million people, is prone to natural hazards such as tropical storms, earthquakes and hurricanes all of which have intensified since the destructive effects of Hurricane Ivan in 2004 (Macpherson, Ackpinar-Elci and Ford 2013 p. 1). Consequently, the Caribbean can no longer remain on the periphery of the global warming discourse given the impact of climate change which will be “felt more” by Small Island Development States (SIDS) with their social, economic and geographic susceptibilities (Benjamin 2010, p. 78).

Notably, “natural and human-made disasters” weaken “human capabilities” and jeopardize “human development” particularly for the poor and vulnerable (Caribbean Human Development Report 2016 p. 7). Historically, people prepare every year for “something” to happen yet, according to Benjamin (2010) SIDS are “largely ill-equipped to deal effectively with the problem of climate change” (p.79). The demand will be for policies to address both “domestic growth and development” since climate change is a developmental as well as an environmental concern (Benjamin 2010 p. 88).

The Caribbean Human Development Report (CHDR 2016) indicated that in 2009, of the population in Dominica, 28.8 percent were poor (p. 102). Furthermore, Government’s revenue is largely dependent on agriculture, export of services and its promotion of (nature tourism) services (World Bank Report 2010) which can be significantly affected by natural hazards particularly when they overwhelm the nation’s ability to adequately respond to their occurrence. In addition to Dominica’s GDP being

Abstract

This paper examines students’ experiences as a post disaster response in the Caribbean. The examination of reports of graduate Psychology and Social Work students, a Social Work Practitioner and programme staff of the Dominica Social Welfare Division who were involved in the University of the West Indies’ (UWI) Service-Learning programme, the Caribbean Internship Programme (CIP), provides critical considerations for service-learning as a model to be utilised in the future.

The study revealed the following:

- * the experience of severe hazardous events has redefined the types of support needs of the Dominica Social Welfare Division. This will impact the nature of the partnership between the Division and the UWI/CIP
- * grassroots community-based agency prompts the propensity for mutual support and regional integration
- * pre-disaster preparation dynamics must be understood for there to be effective post disaster recovery responses
- * the need for greater collaboration in revising the social work programme curriculum to meet the changing needs of organisations facilitating service-learning

susceptible to climate change, storms and hurricanes are projected to cause destructive impacts to agriculture, tourism, land, housing and infrastructure (Benjamin 2010 p.81). These impacts were evident in Dominica in 2015 after Tropical Storm (TS) Erika as the country experienced negative growth of - 0.3 percent of its real GDP (IMF 2015 p.1, CHDR 2016, p.140).

It is at this juncture that regional support initiatives like the Caribbean Internship Programme (CIP) become a critical resource for a national response to local risks and challenges. Recent experiences of severe natural hazards, particularly in the Eastern Caribbean have also highlighted the value of regional partnerships as an essential prong in the response to the local effects of disasters.

Apart from the challenges of managing the effects of change in global weather patterns, there are other experiences such as the negative impact of globalization which have affected the growth of economies. Additionally, structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have encouraged significant cuts to public services to the poor while the emigration of its educated workforce has led to the loss of valuable human capital (Shillingford 2013, pp. 147-148). This is, in part, the rationale which led to the development of the Caribbean Internship Project in 2003 which evolved into a multidisciplinary service-learning model programme. The University of the West Indies' Caribbean Internship Programme (CIP) provides support to various governmental and non-governmental organisations in the region primarily through the assignment of graduate level trained interns from the University with the nature of the assignment of interns determined by the agency in the host country.

Dominica has consistently engaged the CIP for support in the provision of services to families and communities. However, as the impact of climate change became more real, efforts have been directed at recovery and the building of local resilience. While governments' support to disasters have characteristically favoured infrastructural and economic assistance (Dash 2009) the CIP partnership plugs the gap in services addressing individual and community psychosocial needs. This is generally accomplished through the provision of psychological support and enhancing community capacity for self-support.

The advent of Tropical Storm (TS) Erika in 2015, not only resulted in significant infrastructural damage, but also an increase in the number of persons reported as experiencing psychological stress and an increase in demand for the services provided by agencies like the Welfare Division of the Ministry of Social Services, Family and Gender Affairs (O. Wallace, Personal Communication 2018). This underscored the need for the provision of services to enhance both psychological and social well-being which resulted in an invitation for support from the CIP. In response, the CIP facilitated the deployment of a former social work lecturer, who employed a community-based psychosocial support as the main intervention strategy for work with agency staff, other local first responders and communities.

Subsequent to TS Erika, Dominica has experienced severe hazardous events annually which affect efforts to restore normalcy on the island. This paper will examine the application of a community-based psychosocial support and service-learning model through an in-depth interview with key agency personnel as well as, the review of the reports produced by the CIP supported participants which described the situation, outlined the approach taken and the lessons learnt post Erika. It is hoped that this paper will help relevant stakeholders to appreciate the role of service-learning in advancing personal and professional interest through

collaborative efforts for disaster response. Furthermore, it provides an avenue for stimulating the discourse around community-based psychosocial support and its use as both a pre and post disaster response.

Literature Review

University-Community Partnerships through Service-Learning

The (2012) report of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) acknowledges the importance of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) including its emphasis on climate change and disaster risk reduction. The involvement of universities in partnership with communities encourages the “strengthening of people’s capacities to bring about change” (UNESCO p. 5). University-community partnerships find expression in service-learning programmes, which provide immense possibilities for “colleges and universities to meet their goals for student learning and development while making unique contributions to addressing, community, national, and global needs” (Jacoby 1996 in Jacoby 2003 p. 1). Williamson et al (2016) also emphasize the benefits of “enhancing scholarship, curriculum, teaching and research” (p. 55).

With the increasing occurrence of hazardous events, service-learning programmes which give attention to creating sustainable environments and reduce risks from disasters, are critical, particularly in the Caribbean context where available resources are limited and depleting.

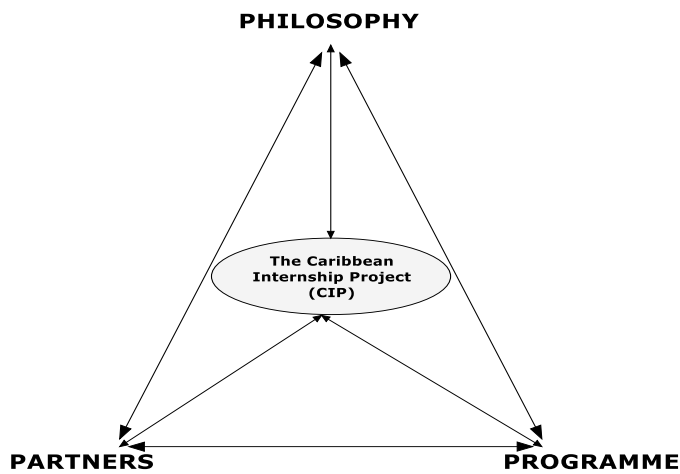
The UWI through its mandate to serve 15 Caribbean countries and the underserved communities recognizes the importance of empowering and transforming Caribbean people as articulated in its mission statement “to advance learning, create knowledge and foster innovation” (<https://www.mona.uwi.edu/about-uwi/mission>). The CIP, a collaborative effort of three UWI campus sites (the UWI Cave Hill, Barbados, the UWI St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago and the UWI Mona, Jamaica) has evolved to fulfil the opportunity for the UWI to carry out its role in improving the lives of the most vulnerable in the region while facilitating hands-on experience for UWI students in the various disciplines.

Shillingford (2013) posits that, the CIP is unique in that it not only emphasises student learning, but importantly, it seeks to meet specific demands faced by agencies in need of critical assistance (p. 165). Therefore, the partnership is driven by the needs of partner agencies rather than pre-determined program objectives determined solely by CIP administrators and/or programme instructors. This is presumed to produce a more mutually beneficial relationship which manifests in the receptiveness of agencies partnering with the UWI to fill gaps and build capacity.

Allen (2008), describes the comprehensive nature of the UWI’s then Caribbean Internship Project’s (now a Programme) service-learning model as a “tripartite synergistic model” (See Fig.1) which emphasises “a philosophy of human and social development”, a diversity of partners and capacity building programmes delivered by interns that are beneficial to social service agencies in the Caribbean” (pp. 69-70).

Figure 1

**The Caribbean Internship Project (CIP):
A Tripartite Synergy**



Shillingford (2013) on the other hand, while highlighting the personal and professional development gained by interns from the experience, recognizes the importance of the CIP service-learning model in providing essential services where there would otherwise be a void in service delivery, while at the same time, facilitating institutional building at the organisational and community levels (pp. 161-163).

Ultimately, the combined economic and social reality of the Caribbean in addition to shortfalls in existing services utilised especially by the poor, provides credence to the assertion that service-learning holds promise as an initiative that is strategic through partnerships which benefit the “common good” and in this case its use as an added approach to disaster mitigation in the Caribbean is appropriate (Jacoby 2003, pp 255-256).

Community-Based Psychosocial Support

While university-community partnership through service learning demonstrates the CIP’s “tripartite synergistic model”, it must be noted that this model may be layered with various techniques and approaches based on the nature of the engagement with communities. Community-based psychosocial support, now widely accepted as an essential response during times of crises and disasters, was the cross-cutting theme in the CIP’s response to the passage of TS Erika. This is critical in a context where Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment gives primacy to the quantifiable impact of the disaster (Government of Dominica Rapid Damage and Impact Assessment Tropical Storm Erika – August 27, 2015 p. 6) with negligible reference to the psychosocial effects on individuals and communities.

The term psychosocial must be understood from a historical perspective and as a central dynamic both within the context of social work practice (Turner, 1996; Goldstein, 2017) and the current approach adopted by most disaster relief agencies since 2004 (Dash, 2009). According to Hayward (2012) the compound word “psychosocial” had its origins in the 1890’s, following an earlier recognition throughout the nineteenth century of the connection between an individual’s personal and social life. It was during the interwar years, however, that social workers,

psychiatrists and psychologists began to study ways in which the psychosocial field can be understood.

In spite of shifting emphases over the years between the adoption of a “functional” or “diagnostic”/psychosocial approach (Turner 1996, p. 560) credit must be given to the social work profession, beginning with the work of Mary Richmond (1899), and ending with clearly outlined principles of psychosocial casework by Francis Hollis (1964), for demonstrating how best psychosocial interventions can be practicalized (Turner, 1996). The framework outlined and refined by Hollis (1964, 1972, Hollis and Woods, 1981) adopts the unique person-in-environment context of social work practice while also having the ability to integrate any new ideas, theories and methods that enhances the psychosocial approach. It is an approach that incorporates knowledge from psychiatry, psychology, sociology, anthropology and social work in order to “fully understand the intrapsychic, interpersonal and environmental aspects of a client’s situation” (Turner 1996, p. 565). In short, psychosocial support is an integrated, holistic concept based on social systems theory that assumes that change in any one system has the potential to influence changes in other related systems.

In the context of crises and disasters, the greater concern for the psychological and mental health of individuals and populations became paramount in the post-war years with emphasis placed on psychological and psychiatric interventions. The focus was on Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), Psychological Debriefing (PD) or Trauma (Risk) Management with the intent to prevent or minimise any concomitant Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

With the passing of time and the increase in worldwide disasters, it soon became clear that following a disaster “psychological recovery” was not only essential for persons experiencing psychological stress but that “social recovery” is equally fundamental for both the individual and to aid community-rebuilding (Dash, 2009). The psychosocial approach, already embraced by most members of the major helping professions (Goldstein, 2013; Greenberg and Wessely, 2017; APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018), was formally adopted by the major humanitarian agencies with the incorporation of minimum standards for psychosocial support by the Sphere Project (Sphere, 2004) and the development of the Interagency Standing Committee Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (IASC, 2007). In addition, several organisations, such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) began to develop resource material and training manuals for assisting countries in their disaster management cycle response.

Psychosocial support is both a preventive and curative measure. It is defined by the IFRC in its manual, *Psychosocial Interventions: A Handbook*, as “a process of facilitating resilience within individuals, families and communities. By respecting the independence, dignity and coping mechanisms of individuals and communities, psychosocial support promotes the restoration of social cohesion and infrastructure” (p. 25).

Goldstein (2017) in a brief article in the *Oxford Bibliographies* states that the goals of the psychosocial framework “were to restore, maintain, and enhance the personal and social functioning of individuals through mobilizing strengths; supporting coping capacities; building self-esteem; modifying dysfunctional patterns of thinking, feeling, and relating to others; linking people to necessary resources; and alleviating environmental stressors”.

Greenberg and Wessely (2017) agree with Goldstein (2013) in their assertion that *“Although the results of screening programs are mixed and the use of debriefing is to be avoided, recent decades have provided some positive findings in respect of improving mental health after disasters. There is good evidence that social support both within communities and organizations can be highly protective of mental health.... science has helped confirm that it is better to rely on supporting the bonds between people within communities and trauma-exposed organizations to mitigate the psychological impact of disaster than it is to fly in “experts” who neither properly understand those involved or the situation which people have been exposed to”* (p. 250)

Reifels, L., Pietrantonio, L., Prati, G., Kim, Y., Kilpatrick, D. G., Dyb, G., Halpern, J., Olf, M., Brewin, C. R., O'Donnell, M. (2013) highlight the importance of both international researchers and clinicians coming together as was demonstrated at the 13th meeting of the European Society for Traumatic Stress Studies in 2013. Their online article reported that at that symposium, six disasters that occurred in five developed countries, including the USA, Great Britain and four European countries were examined. Lesson learnt from the research undertaken were outlined in the paper's abstract as “the need to: (1) tailor the psychosocial response to the specific disaster, (2) provide multi-dimensional psychosocial care, (3) target at-risk population groups, (4) proactively address barriers in access to care, (5) recognize the social dimensions and sources of resilience, (6) extend the roles for mental health professionals, (7) efficiently coordinate and integrate disaster response services, and (8) integrate research and evaluation into disaster response planning.

In addition to adopting an immediate post disaster psychosocial response, it was recognized that any rebuilding and redevelopment process must be a long-term one, beginning with goals set within the first five years and with psychosocial support as a crosscutting intervention. The focus of this process should be to work within communities and to use any disaster as an opportunity for putting into place a more resilient, robust set of community development strategies (Dash, 2009). Based on lessons learnt from three South Asian countries - tsunamis in the Maldives and Sri Lanka and a cyclone in Bangladesh – Dash argues for long-term post disaster community-based psychosocial support programming.

In summary, the focus of psychosocial support is not narrowly confined to just mental or psychological health that is dependent on clinical expertise. It is a much broader-based support that can be included in any life skills training at any time. It is a concept embedded in holistic recovery. It is also community-based and should be a cross-cutting theme in all aspects of community development and especially is required during the disaster response and recovery period. Additionally, it should be considered an important developmental concept for national recovery.

Case Description

The Ministry of Social Services, Family and Gender Affairs (now the Ministry of Health and Social Services) engages the assistance of the UWI's CIP annually to identify and assign interns that are capable of successfully contributing to the mandate of the Ministry. The directives for the interns are usually guided by specific agency needs.

On August 27, 2015, TS Erika devastated the Commonwealth of Dominica resulting in 30 direct deaths and destruction to infrastructure and communities. The Ministry of Social Services, Family and Gender Affairs requested assistance from the CIP with recovery efforts in affected communities. The CIP's response was three-pronged:

- 1) the assignment of two clinical psychology interns to work with the Social Welfare Division's clinical services, one intern who was already assigned in the pre TS Erika period had her internship extended for a further three months;
- 2) the delivery of training in post disaster community-based psychosocial support for members of staff in the Ministry of Social Services, Family and Gender Affairs and CIP assigned interns by a retired UWI social work lecturer and practitioner and;
- 3) the deployment of a social work intern who specialized in community practice to work with the employees of the Local Government Division of the Ministry and residents in two of the communities affected by the passage of TS Erika.

Method

While the CIP's programme directives are accomplished through ongoing collaboration with partner agencies, all the interns must produce verbal and written reports which detail their role, the challenges and all timely deliverables submitted while completing the internship. This process generally facilitates appropriate feedback and support for the interns as well as, when necessary, adjustments to assignments interns must complete. This also gives the interns an opportunity to evaluate the programme and make recommendations to the CIP administrator for changes.

In addition at the agency level a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted with the key liaison personnel from the Ministry of Social Services Family and Gender Affairs. Both the reports from all three interns engaged in the TS Erika post recovery process and the transcript from the semi-structured interviews were reviewed using the process of thematic analysis to code and organise into themes critical to the description and assessment of the case.

The thematic analysis produced four major themes, which, in addition to underscoring the benefits of service learning to interns, agencies and communities, stridently drew attention to some of the major challenges facing Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Both interns and agency personnel were able to clearly articulate the challenges as well as possible solutions as they recount their experience with service-learning in the context of a post disaster response.

Theme One: Navigating the demand for increased community-based service and time bound placements.

Disasters invariably expose the limits of any country's resources. This was the experience of staff of the Social Welfare Division in Dominica, after the passage of Tropical Storm (TS) Erika. The demand on social services were significantly amplified by disaster related deaths and the destruction of infrastructures across the island.

Findings noted the limitations of the resources needed to service existing clientele in the pre disaster period while the post Erika period pointed to an increase in clients to be serviced by already strained resources. An increase in reports of trauma that occurred prior to Erika was observed as well as the observation that TS Erika appeared to have eroded the coping mechanisms employed to deal with pre-

existing trauma experienced by some client's. The benefits to the wider community could not be adequately realised due to the increase in the demand for limited resources which was compounded by the time constraints levied on the responding agencies (interns are recruited for a period of three months with the possibility of an extension of up to 6 months).

Successfully overcoming this challenge would require opportunities for longer internships that allowed interns to move beyond preliminary assessments, to implementing alternative action plans that will maximise impact for the population being served.

Theme Two: Community engagement and participation

A major tenet of the UWI/CIP service-learning approach is the engagement and active participation of local communities. Furthermore, the forecast of the possibility of experiencing more intense natural hazards in the Caribbean, renders the local community more susceptible to stressors from hazardous events. Therefore, their capacity to respond must be honed through strengthening existing social capital. Consequently, any intervention by external stakeholders at the community level must incorporate strategies and techniques that stimulate the local capacity for community-based psychosocial support. The interns noted that there were underlying issues such as lack of trust, poor communication and weak social relationships resulting in low social capital. The post-disaster climate in Dominica was impacted by pre-existing weak relationships in concert with post-disaster trauma. Additionally, the preliminary assessment conducted by the social work intern of the targeted communities revealed a lack of confidence in the institutions set up for helping those in need and or affected by the disaster.

While the reports from the intern suggest some optimism on the part of the community members for the prospects for honing skills that could aid in the restoration of community life, there was a feeling of deeply entrenched mistrust of the respective Village Councils, the entity that manages the response to communities including the distribution of relief aid. The social work intern reported that "the findings of [sic] the two communities targeted indicate that there is a detachment between Council and community, and this impacts efficiency, trust and communication" (N. Albarus, personal communication, May 20,2016). This mistrust preceded TS Erika but exacerbated the post disaster challenges in the target communities who believe the Councils to be ill-equipped to manage community affairs. This was complicated by a lack of transparency in the conduct of the Council which caused some community members to perceive the Councils' post disaster relief activities to be unfair. In addition to this, the communities have expressed dissatisfaction with the Councils' ability to lead, advocate and make informed decisions for the community's well-being. They also believe that some of those appointed to serve lack the skills required for the task. Therefore, the communities have recommended training in leadership, advocacy, transparency and accountability and disaster preparedness (N. Albarus, personal communication, May 20, 2016). The intern noted the value of supportive communication as a means of restoring trust and establishing credibility. Consequently, it was concluded that steps should be taken to help members of the Village Councils establish relationships that are transparent and progressive.

While the agency supervisor acknowledged that there are limitations in the capacity to adequately provide services to the communities, he reiterated that this is one of the reasons why the partnership with the UWI/CIP is extremely critical to

stimulating the organisation's capacity to respond to its clientele. The partnership provides access to expertise and human capital that may be limited or absent within the organisation. Moreover, the presence of interns who are not of the community could be a vehicle for initiating the process of addressing negative perceptions of entities or institutions tasked with serving vulnerable groups in Dominica and repairing relationships with and within communities.

Theme Three: Community-based education and training in Community-based Psychosocial Support

The training provided through the UWI/CIP in post-disaster community-based psychosocial support was a welcomed intervention for the staff of the Social Welfare Division who participated.

However, the social work intern's report revealed significant challenges in her attempt to fulfil the training objectives for staff in the Local Government Division of the Ministry. The challenge resulted from clashes with the official responsibilities of the agency as well as a perceived lack of recognition of the value of training in the context of more pressing issues such as "advocating for the communities' physical spaces for the impending hurricane season" (N. Albarus, personal communication, May 20,2016). This was a typical example of the competing demands on the ground between relief and welfare mode versus a developmental mode. This tension created a barrier to adopting a more proactive response for future pre-disaster preparation. While the organisation tried to accommodate the planned training in community-based psychosocial support, the potential benefit was undermined by the need to truncate the training to deliver in the limited time provided or in other instances forego training all together.

In the case of the two targeted communities, the intern applied Brager and Specht's (1987) four stages of community organizing in order engage with the community and build their trust. This enabled the conduct of workshops geared at enhancing local organisations' capacity to represent the communities' interest in a way that empowers the community to act while broaching the concept and process of psychosocial support. Participants were eager for further insights for working with communities, including applicability of the model in contexts not limited to pre/post disaster training.

The intern concluded that the communities welcomed the intervention which afforded them an opportunity to explore their capabilities and prospects for honing or developing new skills that could help them restore some semblance of normalcy to community life. The intern utilised the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) method in facilitating the process of unearthing the communities' perceptions of barriers to self-advocacy and approaches to resolving these barriers to facilitate positive action. These discussions provided a skeletal framework for further assessment of the support needs as articulated by the communities to ensure a fit between service provision and community reality.

In the final analysis the intern determined that the complete training in psychosocial support planned for staff of the Local Government Division should have been provided to local community members, suggesting that "they seem to have a greater and more meaningful understanding of it than the Local Government staff" (N. Albarus, personal communication, May 20,2016). Again, agency personnel acknowledged the need for the training, but noted that in the context of limited personnel, recovery action is priority, thus the timing was not feasible for accommodating the training in its entirety.

On the other hand participants from the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry who participated in community-based psychosocial support training and who were appreciative of the new knowledge, went further in identifying the training areas in psychosocial support for further inclusion or greater emphasis – how to assist persons who had a “pre-existing trauma” and are re-traumatized following a disaster; how to meet the needs of first responders who are themselves experiencing loss; and putting emphasis on the unique application of the model, especially in the context of clarifying the distinction between spirituality and religion.

Theme Four: Outcomes for Interns, the Social Welfare Division, and the UWI/CIP

Despite challenges in completing planned deliverables, the interns reported personal and professional benefits derived from the service-learning experience. All three interns reported an appreciation for the opportunity to work independently, conducting training sessions and assessing priority needs of the population served.

The Social Welfare Division reported significant benefits in the area of clinical assessment and support to counsellors particularly in the provision of services to children. The partnership with the UWI/CIP has evolved into a crucial resource for supplementing limited staff resource, especially in times of crisis. The UWI/CIP was among the first responders post-Erika, facilitating the psychosocial support training to staff that enhanced their ability to reach and adequately respond to clients. The agency continues to use the partnership as a catalyst for enabling the rebuilding efforts. According to the senior staff member. “Post-Erika, two interns were here and right away we could provide quality information and professional intervention. They knew what they were doing, which is one of the reasons I think people kept coming back even after they had left” (O. Wallace Personal Communication). There was an emphasis on the value derived from clinical psychologists and social workers as it was felt that the skills brought by these interns were limited in the Division.

The interns lauded the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills outside of the context of “academia” with one reporting that “the tasks thus far have capitalized on my Clinical Psychology training and qualifications and in some aspects have diverted from the conventional and comfortable processes” (Personal Communication, 2016). Another highlighted the fact that the setting allowed her to hone her relationship building and management skills as she relied on assistance from the staff and the community to ensure that there was a match with her interpretation of what was communicated, and the interventions delivered. All three interns recognised the value of adjusting in a different cultural setting and relying on their team to know what resources are available as well as to ensure that communication was clear, and plans were correctly developed to serve the clients.

On the part of the host agency, the experience of having interns post disaster, has created an even greater appreciation for the UWI/CIP service-learning programme. Furthermore, the cultural exchange has engendered mutual respect and interest in the development process regardless of nationality. The result has been a breakdown of some myths and generalisations about the behaviours and or attitudes of persons from other Caribbean islands that may undermine efforts towards working together. The supervisor of all three interns noted that while there may be flawed perceptions generally about persons who are university trained or from other Caribbean islands, when the communities work with interns who deliver themselves not only professionally but also in a way that exuded care, they won the respect of all persons in the community. This level of grassroots interaction with the peoples and

their communities is a crucial part of the groundwork for breaking down barriers to establishing strong regional ties while simultaneously stimulating locality development.

Discussion

While these themes are often repeated concepts in the dialogue on Caribbean regional integration and development, together they combine to teach an overall important lesson – disasters will always be sober reminders that building strong local and regional partnerships are activities that should never be neglected. Service-learning engaged even prior to the occurrence of any disaster, always aim to foster the empowerment of communities. The process involves motivating interest, identifying local leadership, conducting assessment of the community's cohesion and ability to discuss and gain consensus. Additionally, the process from assessment, to decision-making, to collaboration, calls for establishing widespread community involvement and a good system of communication, the development and strengthening of a local organisation with the capacity to link with internal and external groups/organizations to aid problem solving (Mattessich et al 1997, pp. 20-38). This approach is also supported by research by Ranis, Stewart & Ramires (2000) who concluded that “economic growth itself will not be sustained unless preceded or accompanied by improvements in human development” (p. 213). Importantly Bowles and Gintis (2002) also highlight vital characteristics of social capital including norms, cooperation and trust which benefit community governance and problem-solving as groups work towards specific goals (pp.F420-421).

The restrictions to participatory problem solving and sustainable development as a result of conflicts between groups, namely the communities and the Councils, led to resentments and lack of trust over the inability of the Councils to represent the interests of communities. The process to change is recognised as giving considerations to the assessment of the conflict and capacity building for stakeholders through training to be able to manage conflicts and improve levels of social capital and community representation. Service-learning interns assigned to the relevant community development agencies are able to provide technical assistance through training of staff and community members. In addition, through personal coaching and modelling, future commitment, competence and confidence which are supportive to the development of the social capital and trust needed to enrich collaboration are assured.

It was interesting to find that the interns, as outsiders, or the neutral third-parties were recommended to facilitate and mediate the community's development. This proposition may give the community greater confidence in the possibility that their concerns will be heard making them more likely to speak out about the challenges. While this speaks to the value of the service-learning partnerships, it is also an indication that overcoming the challenges of conflicts and tensions to community engagement and participation is essential for successful post disaster response by local organisations. Therefore, while the process, at this juncture, may be more successfully initiated by interns it must be fully undertaken by Local Government officers and Village Councils demonstrating evidence of participatory engagement and problem solving, a good system of communication and trustworthiness.

Such a reality could be interpreted as a validation of the UWI/CIP's philosophy that psychosocial support (including applying psychological first aid and supportive communication) should be a cross-cutting theme in all aspects of the community building, rebuilding and development process. The interns' report highlighted that training in this regard, should also include skills in trauma management, self-care for responders and how to cope with spiritual issues.

Opportunities Post Disasters

The occurrence of disasters should be viewed as opportunities for growth and further development. Particularly in the context of the UWI/CIP service-learning initiative which aims to facilitate real time interventions while developing local capacity. Consequently, the continued partnerships under this programme will contribute to addressing the problems of "low social capital, issues of trust, poor communication and weak relationships".

The challenge of limited resources and time constraints reported by interns and supervisor alike, indicates the need for longer internships that provide the latitude for interns working alongside the organisation, to move beyond gap filling and preliminary assessments, to implementing alternative action plans that will maximise impact for the population being served. This may mean re-examining the framework for ensuring sustainability after internships have ended. The focus would then be on citizen agency, capacity building and responsibility-taking.

Ultimately, the report from the interns as well as feedback from the agency supervisor revealed a need for a closer examination of the collaboration in relation to deliverables and measurement of outcome. There appears to be a disparity in the definition of community development from the local government agencies' perspective as compared to the perspective of the interns and the CIP. Next to assessing for and treating with trauma, the agency appears to focus on welfare provision while UWI-CIP focuses on a developmental approach which enhances social capital and participation and stimulates local responsibility and action. This has revealed that there needs to be a revision of the expectations of the partnership to better integrate the two in a way that is truly sustainable by the agency and in the communities served.

The Way Forward

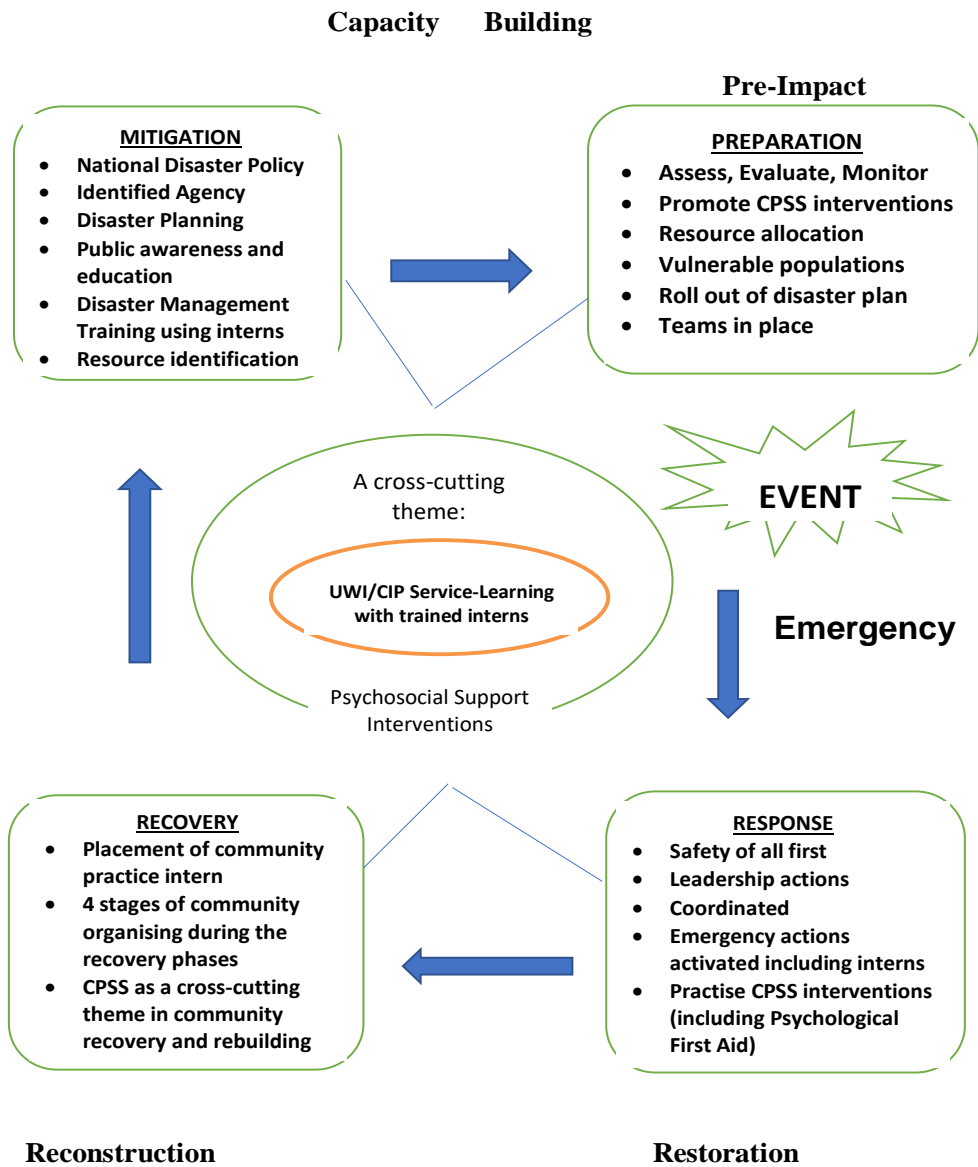
The UWI-CIP, as a service-learning model, is in a unique position to respond to the need for local training in disaster management in the Caribbean while simultaneously informing curricula changes at the UWI. Therefore, steps need to be taken to incorporate a more pro-active approach both in preparing and training interns on how to assist in the process, including advocating for as well as undertaking appropriate leadership actions towards both social capital /human development and economic recovery and growth.

The experience in Dominica reveals a need for a strategy that will stimulate resilience among Caribbean people in order to quickly restore normalcy post disaster. Training in a set of psychosocial life skills as the foundation for building community-based psychosocial support is a crucial aspect of the way forward. Such skills can be taught at any time to anyone and should take place during the pre-disaster period. It will prove indispensable during the post-disaster period when social bonding, unity and team-building are pre-requisites for family, community and national recovery.

Consequently, we are recommending that this post-disaster response to Dominica should be further developed to incorporate implementation of community-based psychosocial support in all phases of the disaster management cycle. This disaster management cycle, adopted by humanitarian agencies since the 1970s, and which describes the four phases of managing a disaster – *mitigation* and *preparation* for capacity building in order to minimise the impact of disaster, *response* on how to react during and immediately after a disaster and *recovery* during the reconstruction period - should become an integral part of the UWI/CIP service-learning tripartite synergistic model.

This model – *The UWI/CIP Service-Learning Disaster Management Model* is described below. Interns should be required to complete training in Disaster Management, including Psychosocial Support training and should be able to assist in all aspects of the disaster management cycle. It is hoped that Caribbean governments will adopt the model depicted below as an integral part of their national disaster management programme. In this model, examples are given on ways in which interns can be utilised at each stage of the cycle with emphasis on implementing Community-based Psychosocial Support (CPSS) at all levels of intervention.

The UWI/CIP Service-Learning Disaster Management Model



Conclusion

The themes that emerged highlighted the fact that

1. The service-learning partnership continues to be a critical resource for facilitating post disaster recovery and strengthening resilience capacity in SIDS
2. The programme's use of strategies which facilitate grassroots engagement is a possible catalyst for mutual support at the regional level
3. The efficacy of governance frameworks and the nature of interactions among members of the community prior to a disaster will permeate the post disaster response within affected communities.

In all of the above, the service-learning model was purported to be a key tenet in establishing assets towards recovery and resilience in SIDS. Training in community-based psychosocial support life skills should be a cross-cutting theme in the implementation of those assets.

Generally, feedback from interns both enables the programme administrator of the UWI/CIP to monitor interns' activities and to make informed decisions about curricula development changes and the future training of students /interns. In the case of Dominica, the interns' post Erika reports highlighted the increase in service demand and its impact on those tasked with providing services particularly those who themselves have experienced some kind of loss or trauma. The interns were able to identify what skills proved beneficial in a post disaster scenario and what additional competences would have been useful to the agency.

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