



Thought Leadership

The Mhurikay: A Case for an Additional New Social Housing Programme (NSHP) Modality

Written by: Cindy Archat,
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The Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation (MEGJC), through its housing portfolio, assesses government owned lands for future utilization, undertakes pre-planning and planning assessments, plans and implements housing projects. MEGJC also monitors the implementation of joint ventures and facilitation projects, upgrades existing sites, maintains infrastructure prior to handing over to local authorities and maintains government owned rental housing units and properties.

One of the flagship initiatives under the housing portfolio is the New Social Housing Programme (NSHP), which was established in 2018 by Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, under the larger Housing, Opportunity, Production and Employment (HOPE) programme. The NSHP was developed to improve the housing condition of the country's poor and disadvantaged population by providing quality, affordable and sustainable housing.

In order to maximize its effectiveness, the NSHP has been divided into three (3) implementation modalities:

- **The provision of indigent housing**
- **Relocation of vulnerable communities facing imminent risk**
- **The Upgrading of Tenements ('Big Yards')**

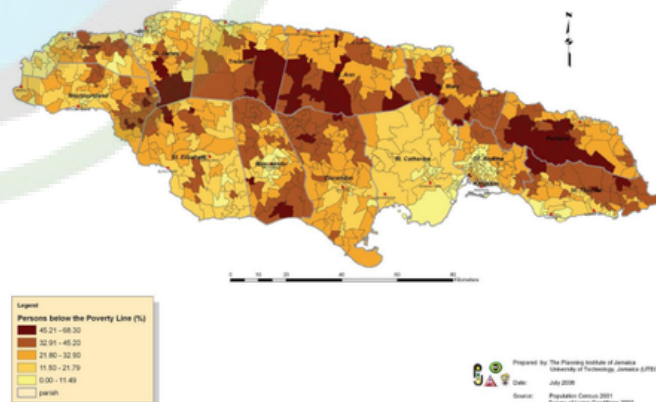
However, while these modalities have been well-received and very successful, there may be room for additional considerations in the form of a gated community targeted specifically at the country's poor and indigent population. Similar to the upgrading of tenements, this proposed modality examines establishing a family centred community for various families in need in one central location but includes additional amenities for the identified families.

Needs/Problems

According to Minister Desmond McKenzie as reported in the Sunday Gleaner on January 26, 2021, *"there are an estimated 2,000 homeless people in Jamaica, around 700 of them in Greater Kingston. The capital's downtown region accounts for about 500 of them"*. Data from the 2011 Population and Housing Census and the 2012 Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions correlated by the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the Statistical Institute of Jamaica, and assistance from the World Bank showed that poverty levels in Jamaica have increased significantly since 1996 in a report entitled "Mapping Poverty Indicators, 2019".

Jamaica's homeless problems became more chronic when Hurricane Gilbert devastated the island in 1988. According to a 2012 report of The National Committee on Homelessness, "the aftermath of this hurricane is one of the main events that led to the development of deep-seated homelessness in Jamaica". According to this report, "there are at least 1,160 persons who are homeless islandwide. A total of 616 homeless persons resides in the parishes of Kingston and St Andrew, while in St James there is a total of approximately 138 persons".

Figure #1
Poverty Levels by Parish





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Data for 2017 showed that there are approximately 2,000 homeless people across the island residing on the streets in abject poverty. A comprehensive population survey needs to be conducted to ascertain the true number of homeless people in Jamaica, as well as those who live and work on the streets and in temporary places of shelter. The result of this survey will assist the Government in implementing future policies and programmes to adequately address this pitfall.

In the 2017/2018 budget, it was proposed that two additional shelters for the homeless are to be built in rural Jamaica. According to one profound noted psychologist, “the continuous thought of opening homeless drop-in shelters, in our view, is retrograde and does not address the real issues of solving the problem of homelessness in Jamaica; if we want to encourage more tourists to visit Jamaica, we build more hotel rooms; in like fashion, if we want to encourage expanded homelessness, we build more homeless shelters.”

Goals/Objectives

The goals and objectives to address the needs/problems as stated above will aid in reducing negative behaviours such as eliminating electricity theft and breaches in the water supply systems, while provide a safe environment for both adults and children, as well as a positive outlook for the future. The additional key benefits of reaching these goals/objectives will help to alleviate social burdens such as the high cost of rent and utilities. This will give the beneficiaries the chance to focus on meaningfully contributing to the society through avenues such as getting a formal education (for those without), getting full-time jobs through the Government and private sectors, the ability to save and fund their children's education, and to be productive citizens.



Entrance (adapted from Khan architecture)

Figure 2: Mock-up of Model Town: The Mhurikay. Source: Archat, 2021

Amenities

The Model Town Housing Government Pilot Project (The Mhurikay), will offer 17 detachable units with an upgraded lifestyle for low-income Jamaican households. It will be free occupancy based with benefits like a community centre and park.



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i. Community Centre

The Mhurikay will take into consideration the need for a recreational space for residents. As a result, every allottee will be given access to the community centre which will host a computer lab, library, gym, and a multi-purpose hall for accommodating events such as birthday parties.

ii. Community Park

A community park that will also be developed. The park will contain a jogging trail to encourage physical fitness as well as a playground for children. The plants at the park will not only contribute to aesthetics but also serve as well-needed green space that encourages social interactions amongst residents and help to establish and maintain community ties.

iii. A Gated and Secure Community

There will be restricted entry through use of electronically controlled gates where all entries and exits will be logged by an automated computer system in a convenient manner. The gates will also be manned by professional security personnel for additional security and effective surveillance.



Figures 3-5: 3D Models of The Mhurikay. Source: Archat, 2021

The Mhurikay not only offers the proposed recipients, Jamaica's poor and indigent population, a chance of dignity through the ownership of a home, but also enables the fulsome home ownership experience in keeping with the current times. It is building upon a strong and established foundation when it comes to providing thoughtful, sustainable and high-quality housing solutions through the Government of Jamaica and helping to ensure a better quality life for citizens in need.

This proposed new modality, **“the total community upgrade”**, will blend all the necessary recreational and green spaces to provide an enriched community experience which can serve as a blueprint for similar such communities islandwide.