

# Culture as a Tool for Sustainable Development: The Case Study of the Pinelands Creative Workshop

## BARBADOS

### Introduction

A major challenge for sustainable human development is to enable people to see the potential within themselves and to take responsibility for their future. It is in this regard that the Pinelands Creative Workshop (PCW) in Barbados exemplifies a group that has worked consistently within its community and with others to promote ideas of self-reliance, positive self-esteem and community cohesion, as well as an alternative mode of community governance which stresses community self-awareness and self-reliance.

The PCW's main tool is culture - popular theatre and dance, are used to stimulate community reflection and promote togetherness. The PCW has used its cultural product, not only as a tool for education, but also as a means of generating income which enables the group itself to be self-sustaining and places it in a better position to promote development in its community. The dynamic and committed leadership,

operating in a flexible structure, has contributed significantly to the success of the group. Through its outreach activities, the PCW has not only had an impact on the lives of the people in the Pinelands community, but has also helped to promote concepts of sustainable community action throughout Barbados.

### Background

Pinelands is a settlement community. It was one of the first government low-income housing projects designed to resettle people from throughout Barbados who were displaced by the floods of the late 1940's. When completed, the conglomeration of two-story blocks, housed people from various socio-economic backgrounds who came from as far as St. Philip and St. James. Residents lived in a densely populated environment, with no community facilities and no social development programme. It was a recipe for conflict, and in a short space of time Pinelands

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became synonymous with instability and with crime. It was famed for the three **P's**

*If you were from Pinelands, and you came before Magistrate Perry's court, you were sure to be sent to Prison.*

Many of the Pinelands' residents were determined to change the negative public image of the Pinelands community. They formed committees and through voluntary community labour and support of donor agencies, the Pinelands Community Centre, the Golden Rock Day Care Centre and a Senior Citizens' Home were built in the late 1960's. By **1975**, the Pinelands Development Council had been established with the aim of fostering greater collaboration among agencies working in the community, as well as the determination to create/develop a more positive image of the community. It sponsored a Sports and Cultural Youth Group which mainly focused on sports and sporting competitions.

**1978** was a milestone year. Council leaders prevailed on the National Cultural Foundation to sponsor a summer workshop on the creative arts to stimulate young people to develop their cultural awareness and skills. And they were indeed stimulated!

Through dance and drama, the thirty workshop participants not only explored their creativity, but also

developed a heightened self-awareness and a consciousness of the contribution they could make to their community. Participants were so excited by the workshop that they became determined to continue to strengthen the bonds of friendship and unity, and sought support to create a permanent group. The Pinelands Creative Workshop was born.

### **Organisational Context**

The Pinelands Creative Workshop is a group of dedicated young men and women determined to make a difference in their community and to create a more sustainable future. The hallmark of the PCW is culture, dance and drama, which are used as a starting point for community action. In the early years the going was tough and the group battled typical group differences but, supported by strong leadership and a commitment to make a difference, it survived and flourished. The highlight of the year is a major dramatic production and since its inception twenty years ago, the group has only missed one year (**1985**) when a production was not staged. The PCW uses a popular theatre approach which is different from traditional theatre: productions are linked to community needs and concerns. In planning the production, members talk to residents, both as individuals and in informal groups, to identify themes and issues.

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The cultural production is then designed around some of these concerns, and through its staging, reflects the community issues that are important to them. In this way, the production becomes a vehicle for educating the community about topical and major social issues including crime, racism, health, teenage pregnancies, parenting and **AIDS**.

#### *Objectives and Structure*

The PCW has evolved from being an informal cultural group to being one of the leading community based organisations in Barbados. The group's primary objectives are to:

- Develop self-awareness and personal growth.
- Promote a positive community image.
- Educate and uplift its community and other communities.

The structure of the group has also evolved. Although it has an autonomous leadership and management structure, the PCW operates under the umbrella of the Pinelands Development Council and is one of the Council's most active member groups. The PCW currently has a membership of ninety-five, of whom 90% are from the Pinelands community. Its management structure currently includes an executive director, three officers and administrative support staff.

#### *Leadership and Governance*

One significant difference between the PCW and other community groups that have sprung up and have since disintegrated, has been its leadership and membership structure. In the early years, and as in most other community groups, the leadership was elected and membership dues were collected. However, in **1987** the group decided that the financial base and two-year process of elections were not suited to achieving real progress for the group.

The PCW wanted to operate with a more businesslike administrative and management structure that could ensure the continuity of its programmes. The group therefore decided to abandon the biennial election process and, by consensus, to select its leaders on the basis of their skills and track record of action and commitment to the group's philosophy. Membership dues were abolished and greater emphasis placed on establishing and creating a strong financial base through cultural productions and the organisation of cultural training activities and workshops.

The quality of its leadership has been a major factor in ensuring PCW's success. From its earliest days, the PCW had leaders who had a vision of what the Pinelands community could be and the role which the PCW could play in building community spirit and pride, and fostering self-reliance. This deep

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philosophical commitment is shared constantly with old and new members through regular rap sessions and analytical discussions which focus on the goals of the PCW and its various programmes and activities. Nevertheless, in spite of the on-going process for developing the leadership potential of members, it has been difficult for the group to identify persons who are willing to be coached for and to take up middle-level leadership responsibilities.

#### *Administrative Base and Institutional Processes*

In the early years, with few administrative resources at its disposal the PCW simply operated from the homes of its leaders and had minimal administrative systems and procedures. When the PCW experienced difficulties, the Pinelands Development Council assisted by ensuring that financial accountability systems were put in place.

As the group expanded, some of the funds from the productions were allocated to rent a small office and provide a stipend for an executive officer. The expansion of its outreach activities required a bigger base of operations and in 1992, the PCW was able to persuade the Government to lease an old abandoned plantation house for a nominal rental. This was a major achievement, indicating Government's recognition of and support for the group's activities. While the

building needed many repairs, a high degree of voluntary labour from the group, as well as from the community, made it a functional and liveable home base.

#### **Programme Activities and Approach**

Having a physical home base provided, there was a more visible presence in the community, and this strengthened the PCW as a focus for activities in the Pinelands and nearby Wildey communities. Through its own resources and without significant external financial support, the group was able to cover the costs for three staff to organise development programs in the communities.

As it responded to the challenges of the day, the PCW can be seen to have evolved through four phases of organisational life. In its early years, when the group was establishing its identity and exploring its direction, its major concern was the annual cultural production. As the PCW gained national and regional recognition for its cultural productions, it changed its leadership structures and approach. It began to operate in a more business-like manner in its cultural productions, and to deal more explicitly with issues of community governance. It was challenged to use its human resources to expand its range of activities in the community. Today, the PCW is widely

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respected and sought after as a partner for national development programs. It has consolidated its approach, and has shared this as a model for outreach to other communities at national and regional levels.

Over the years, the PCW has synthesised the approach it uses for development of its members. It promotes a renewed approach to community governance and self-reliance with the fundamental belief that people from different segments of the community can work together harmoniously and creatively to enhance the quality of life for residents. The PCW model to achieve this includes three major areas of activity.

#### *Cultural Productions and Community Education*

In the early period, the emphasis was on the cultural performance. The training programmes were focused on improving member skills in drama and dance and funds raised in each production were primarily used for the next production. From this early period, the group's clear commitment to excellence and continuous improvement was exemplified by its catch phrase: "*We are only as good as our last production!*"

After many national productions, the PCW gradually became recognised as a group that could produce a cultural product of a high standard. It won

several awards for its performances in the National Independence Festival of the Creative Arts (NIFCA). In 1987, it was invited to St. Vincent and in 1989, the PCW took the production "Exodus" on tour both to Trinidad and to the USA, and won regional acclaim for the quality of its performance.

However, as indicated earlier, the cultural production does not stand on its own but is part of the process of community education and mobilisation. The annual production becomes a major talking point in the community, and by bringing new information and insights to an issue, helps to build positive attitudes among residents, and thus contributes to community sustainability.

One notable example came from the 1997 production *Grasshoppers and Snakes*, which had as its theme the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on the family. In the production, a man's careless sexual encounter had multiple repercussions throughout his family and friendship circles. Following the production, the popular phrase "just one time!" became a buzzword for more responsible sexual behaviour throughout the community.

#### *Cultural Product in Sustainable Development*

Not only does the PCW foster values which lead to community sustainability, but the group itself operates in a

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sustainable way. From its inception, the PCW has operated on the principle of self-reliance which has proved to be a major factor in its success. The Pinelands community with its 1998 population of, over five thousand, is its market base and keenly supports productions through high levels of attendance. Up to 1988, the group saw its cultural activities primarily in terms of education with entertainment. A new dimension was created in 1989 after one of the leaders, Hamilton Lashley, attended a course on culture and development, and was exposed to new ideas about linking culture and business.

In this regard, and with a high quality production process, the PCW was in an excellent position to undertake, at short notice, a contract for the staging of a tourism musical extravaganza “2627 and All That.” This production, staged at the Barbados Museum, captures in song and dance aspects of Barbados’ history and culture.

The PCW was one of the few groups with the capacity and skill to produce such a performance on a weekly basis, thus earning additional funds from its cultural product. In addition to the “1627” production, the PCW undertook cultural shows in hotels. Funds raised through the cultural productions were not used to pay the performers individually, but instead to cover PCW’s production costs and to purchase equipment and costumes. These funds

have also been able to pay for up to 95% of the administrative costs of the group’s outreach programs, and have placed the PCW in a better position to launch and sustain other community development initiatives.

#### *Community Outreach and Mobilisation*

The PCW continued to respond to community needs through its outreach cultural activities, training workshops and projects that sought to address both the economic and social needs of people in the community. The PCW has been able to mobilise the community through various types of community outreach activities including:

- Implementing “Pedals for Progress” a project which imported and assembled reconditioned bicycles.
- Organising adult literacy and skills programmes.
- Supporting the Pinelands Sports Club.
- Sponsoring programmes in dance and drama.
- Developing a social programme for families in need.

While dance and drama activities attract mainly the girls and young women, the PCW balances this with its outreach to young men through sporting activities. Sports are seen not just in relation to its competitive aspects, but as a means of involving young people, especially

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young men, in a constructive activity. The discipline required by the sporting activities together with the leadership provided to the young men, have helped to promote self-esteem and to address some of the negative attitudes of the young men toward self and society.

The establishment of a social programme for families in need has also demonstrated PCW's caring response to family concerns, as residents often turn to the group for emergency support including covering hospital expenses, providing school books, providing meals on wheels to the elderly and for other critical needs. In fact, through its social programme, the PCW actually fills some of the gaps in social services which central government has not been able to address.

The various initiatives of the PCW and of other member groups of the Pinelands Development Council have contributed to building a positive image and a high level of community cohesion in Pinelands. This has been instrumental in changing the nation-wide perception of Pinelands to one of a community with a strong community spirit and vibrant community activities, instead of one with rampant crime, as it appeared in the era of the "3P's."

### *National Linkages for Community Mobilisation*

Now in its 20th year, the PCW has achieved a high level of maturity as one of the foremost NGOs in Barbados. PCW's success in Pinelands stimulated interest in using its approach as a model for other communities, and the group was encouraged to work with community groups in Deacon's Farm, Haynesville and Gall Hill which were all low-income housing areas, with a growing reputation for crime and lawlessness - the same issues which Pinelands had faced in its early years.

The PCW provided and supported leadership in these communities to undertake programmes using the Pinelands model of cultural activities to stimulate awareness, participation and action. The interventions had varying levels of success. All of them stimulated community interest in building a more positive image of that community, but the greatest impact was created where the community itself felt a need to undertake practical programs, and particularly where the community's leadership had a vision and deep commitment to creating change in the community.

Pinelands is also sought after as a partner for other national community-based initiatives. Thus, it is actively involved in community aspects of the National Drug Rehabilitation Pro-

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gramme for Barbados. It was also recently selected as one of the implementing agencies for the National Poverty Alleviation Programme, with responsibility for promoting community involvement and providing small loans for community enterprises.

The PCW is perceived as a catalyst for community enterprise and has undertaken consultancies with international organisations, including the Organisation of American States (OAS), to promote enterprise development throughout the Caribbean.

### Successes and Achievements

Many factors contribute to the success of the Pinelands Creative Workshop which is being recognised for the excellent work it has been doing in building community sustainability.

First and foremost, Pinelands has been successful in creating a quality cultural product, with a high professional stamp that is well received both by *its* parent community and by communities throughout Barbados and the Caribbean.

It has been able to use its cultural product to sustain itself for twenty years. After years of breaking even in its production costs, the annual dramatic production now generates enough surplus to provide 95% of the basic

administrative costs of the organisation. Success breeds success, and while Pinelands has been able to attract additional donor funding for many of its outreach programme activities, it is not entirely dependent on outside support for survival.

Pinelands Creative Workshop has been a significant force for change in the Pinelands community. It has acted as a catalyst promoting the growth of people's ideas and self-image, which in turn has had a positive impact on the self-image of the community. Not only can the community boast of having the best community drama group and cultural programme in Barbados, but it can take pride in the national and international recognition of its "sons and daughters." The cultural productions and informal interactions of the PCW members also help community residents to see themselves in different ways.

The efforts of the PCW have contributed to building community cohesion and *this* has had a direct impact on crime reduction in the Pinelands community, making it a model of community activity rather than the hotbed infamous for the "3P's."

The Pinelands model has been shared and has gained high acclaim in national, regional and international fora. **On** a very practical level, the PCW has been instrumental in galvanising other

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communities to use cultural products as catalysts for change in community values and attitudes. PCW's support to the Deacons Farm and Haynesville communities has helped leadership there to undertake innovative approaches to revitalising the images of those communities in a similar way to what had happened in Pinelands ten years previously. In this regard, the Pinelands model of community mobilisation and education through culture has been shared not only in Barbados but in other Caribbean countries.

The high-level of member commitment and participation coupled with a flexible organisational structure have been key factors central to the success of the organisation and have enabled it to survive the typical cycle of group activity and disintegration. This success has not happened by chance. Leadership has been sensitive to meeting the needs of members. In addition, the group strives for consensus in decision making, so everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the direction chosen. These elements have generated a high level of commitment and concern among the members who generally go beyond the call of duty to carry out programmes agreed upon.

A deep, philosophical commitment to 'giving back' to the community undergirds all of Pinelands work. In their meetings, PCW has put aside the traditional ritual adopted by many

groups of reviewing and adopting minutes, a process that often consumes productive group energy. Instead, at meetings, the group focuses on the meaning of what it is **trying** to achieve, and on progress towards achieving its programme objectives. The philosophical concepts of participation and engagement are addressed in practical ways through the various discussions and analysis. The time taken for such analysis not only helps to strengthen the capacity of individual members, but keeps the group focused on the common vision which undergirds its work.

The group has maintained a high level of enthusiasm as well as commitment to its parent community, Pinelands. Group members are not only involved in the creative arts, but are actively involved in many of the other sports and development programmes organised by the organisation. In this way, members keep in touch with the reality of people's lives and challenges, bringing new insights to their public performances.

Pinelands has been able to maintain a balance in the political arena and has therefore been able to attract support and recognition from the various political directorates. This is not an easy feat in a time of political partisanship that affects the way in which groups work with each other.

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## Constraints and Challenges

while the PCW has received support from many government agencies, most notably from the National Cultural Foundation which has actively supported the PCW throughout its history, one of the greatest challenges it has faced has stemmed from government bureaucracy. This has frequently come from departments which neither understand nor appreciate the operations of the group and, rather than being supportive, have appeared to make it difficult for the group to achieve its objectives.

Politics is another major stumbling block. The PCW has been able to maintain a balance in the political arena and has therefore been able to attract support and recognition from the various political directorates. But from time to time, political partisanship in the Pinelands community itself threatens to destroy the gains made in fostering community collaboration and cohesion.

One of the biggest challenges faced by the PCW is the development of middle-level leadership. While there is strong and active participation from members, many of them lack the skills and the confidence to undertake major leadership roles. The challenge of the leaders has been to identify and nurture young persons with potential and gradually encourage them to take greater responsibility in the group's activities.

The PCW faces the same issues that many other groups face and one of the most critical of these is the declining participation of young men in their cultural activities. It is the girls and young women that take the lead in the cultural activities. The PCW has recognised this as a dilemma and is now actively working to involve young men in the group. Closer links with the sports clubs and sponsorship of some of their activities have helped to build bridges with the young men, and are helping them to develop a more positive image of themselves and of their community.

## Lessons Learned

- Culture can be used as an effective tool for self-reliance, by providing products that a group can use to earn income and so sustain itself and its activities. With a commitment to excelling, such products can generate respect not only for their inherent quality, but as a symbol of pride for the wider community.
- Community cohesion and self-reliance can be stimulated through innovative approaches to community governance, but require leadership with a strong commitment to making a difference. When there is effective leadership with a vision of the future and commitment to a philosophy of change, it can stimulate the group and the

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community to develop a positive self-image and a clear perspective of what it can achieve.

- When this vision is shared by members, it can be a major force in sustaining the activities of the group and keeping it focused on achieving its objectives. But in order to share the vision and sustain activities over a long period, regular activities need to be undertaken with the membership to build their awareness and ensure that they fully understand the goals and objectives of the group, and the philosophy underlying these. Awareness is the building block to commitment.
- Effective interventions in and for community action require a thorough analysis of community needs and interests, high levels of leadership commitment and support, as well as people's readiness to undertake different levels of action.

### **Conclusion**

It is not difficult to assess the impact that the PCW has had on its community, in both tangible and intangible ways.

There is no doubt that it has been a significant force for change. Using its cultural product, the PCW has not **only** brought national and regional acclaim to the Pinelands community, but it has used this product to generate income that is ploughed back into the community.

Through its various approaches, the PCW has stimulated within the community innovative approaches to community governance and self-reliance. It has been able to foster a more positive feeling among the youth and the wider community about their self-worth, which has in turn contributed to changes in attitudes on the various issues that affect the community.

**An** evaluation of the factors of success, highlights the importance of strong leadership committed to making a difference and promoting an alternative model of community governance. It is this understanding, constantly reinforced by reflection and analysis, which has made the PCW different from many other groups, and has been a major factor in its success.

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### **Recommendations**

The experiences of the Pinelands Creative Workshop demonstrates a different model of community governance, where a community organisation is taking a leadership role in stimulating people to address their own needs. In this regard, the PCW approach runs counter to the prevailing philosophy among many people and government functionaries - that government is responsible for everything. The promotion of cultural enhancement is reminiscent of an earlier period of self-reliance in Barbados where communities were more cohesive and took responsibility for themselves.

This method of community involvement through the use of cultural artistry lay the groundwork for economic and social transformation of the community. This community which was once crime-ridden has now become a model one which uses culture as a tool for generating income whilst creating pleasure, social interaction as well as self-worth to its members and people of the community.

This effective use of cultural potential can be instituted with a few adjustments as a rehabilitation programme to effect positive change in delinquent youths who commit crimes throughout the country.

Although other organisations have through voluntary activities developed many programmes within their respective communities, the difference in the case of the PCW is that it demonstrates how a community organisation can itself be self-sustaining. It has used its cultural product to ensure its own self-sufficiency and to generate funds that enable it to pursue programmes that increased the quality of life in the community and this should be promoted, especially in areas where marginalised and poverty-stricken people are dominant. This innovative approach should be extended in the near future to other communities within the region.

The experience of the PCW points to the challenge for government to recognise and provide greater support to communities as valuable partners in sustainable development.