

## Proposal

# Local voices, Global choices the Mocho Oral testimony project, Jamaica

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Accepted 12, March 2007

*"...When I was a young girl...you would know which month we would have rain, which month would be dry, so as a farmer you could prepare what you are going to plant. But things are different now everything has changed. The rainy month turned to drought, the dry month turned rainy, in the hot month a storm is blowing. Everything has changed."-- Hazelyn, farmer and housewife, Mocho, Jamaica*

The International Panel on Climate Change latest report highlights that developing countries will experience the effects of climate change disproportionately. This is largely due to poverty, which inhibits the capacity of people to find the resources to adjust to and cope with climatic changes. It is also due to the fact that many of the world's poorest people inhabit marginal lands where natural resources may be limited and their livelihoods stretch the limits of the local environment. Under such circumstances additional stresses such as extreme weather can have a devastating effect. However, because of their precarious situation the poor are also experienced coping with and adapting to crisis situations. Panos is using oral testimony as a methodology to hear from such communities themselves about their relationship with their environment and their responses to climate change and other environmental changes. Identifying how communities are already adapting climate change is an important step towards discovering what their priorities are. Giving a voice to people in this way enables them to share their experiences, obstacles and positive initiatives with other communities and policy-makers. Valuing their knowledge alongside more traditionally authoritative sources such as science-based knowledge can be an empowering experience for the communities involved.

## INTRODUCING THE PROJECT

The Panos Oral Testimony Project serves to document the Mocho community's experience of environmental and climate change issues and communicate those to Jamaican, regional Caribbean and international audiences.

While "testimony" can have legal or other meanings, what Panos means by "oral testimonies" are open-ended interviews around a series of topics, drawing on direct personal memory and experience. Communicating first-hand accounts from those facing environmental and climate change on a daily basis is a way of ensuring that their experiences and perspectives become part of the environment and development debate. It is also hoped that the project will stimulate appropriate action in support of communities such as Mocho. The particular methodology and approach has been conceived to strengthen the communication capacities of the community and to

mobilise its members to work on solutions to problems of environmental change, such as land degradation.

Twelve members of the community were trained in oral testimony methodology and gathered 47 in-depth interviews with men and women living in Mocho. The individual accounts provide the human context to environmental issues, and demonstrate that environmental change can be related to and have an impact on many different aspects of an individual's life and community.

The testimonies are now being edited for publication in book form. In addition, a newsletter on climate change, environmental and community issues is being produced bi-monthly and circulated in the community – it constantly generates discussion on the issues. Over the next six months residents will be supported with training aimed at strengthening their capacity to deal with the environmental issues they have identified and prioritized.



The group of 12 residents from Mocho who were trained in Oral testimony collection

## INTRODUCING MOCHO

Mocho is situated about 1.5 hours drive north west from Jamaica's capital Kingston, and is a collection of some 52 district settlements. In the late 1960s bauxite mining started in the area and continued up until 2003. The mining company – Jamalco – is still active in the area in terms of on-going reclamation of recently mined-out land. The mining industry has had significant environmental, social and economic impacts on the community and therefore features significantly in the interviews. For example, Mocho used to produce a lot of citrus and coffee crops but although much of the mined-out land has been reclaimed, it is no longer suitable for the same sort of agricultural production and many members of the community have switched to producing more seasonal cash crops, such as tomatoes and pumpkins.



A section of mined out bauxite lands in Mocho being reclaimed.

Mocho was badly affected by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004 and the experiences and long-term impacts of the hurricane are explored in the interviews. When discussing climate change more generally, the narrators mention changes in rainfall and temperature, and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns. For example, one secondary school teacher reported that: "When I was growing up, the 8th of August used to be the day to plant maize, and there were other dates for other crops. But now the farmers are confused by the weather and we have lost this certainty of when to plant crops."

In terms of infrastructure and facilities the area is well served by a network of roads, however, many are in a poor condition due to damage from storms and heavy mining vehicles. There is no piped water supply and so households collect rain water in tanks and use this for domestic consumption. At times of drought people have to purchase water delivered by road in tankers.

Many community members describe Mocho as having a poor image throughout the rest of Jamaica, saying that Mocho and people from Mocho are regarded as "backward", as the following quote illustrates:

*"...there is always this myth about Mocho people being idiots and Mocho people being fools... Mocho people are really not fools, but they are treated differently yes, especially if you go out to look for work... People always look at you... the soil in Mocho is red and so ...if the soil is not red where you going and if a little speck of mud is on your shoe, people will look at you in a [certain] way..." -- Joyce, female, unemployed*

Challenging this image and the stigma attached to living in Mocho proved to be a powerful motivating force for the project participants. They welcomed the equipment and skills to document a full and accurate picture of life in Mocho.



Residents of Stewarton, Mocho clean a community water tank as part of their September 2006 Labour Day project.

## JAMAICAN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

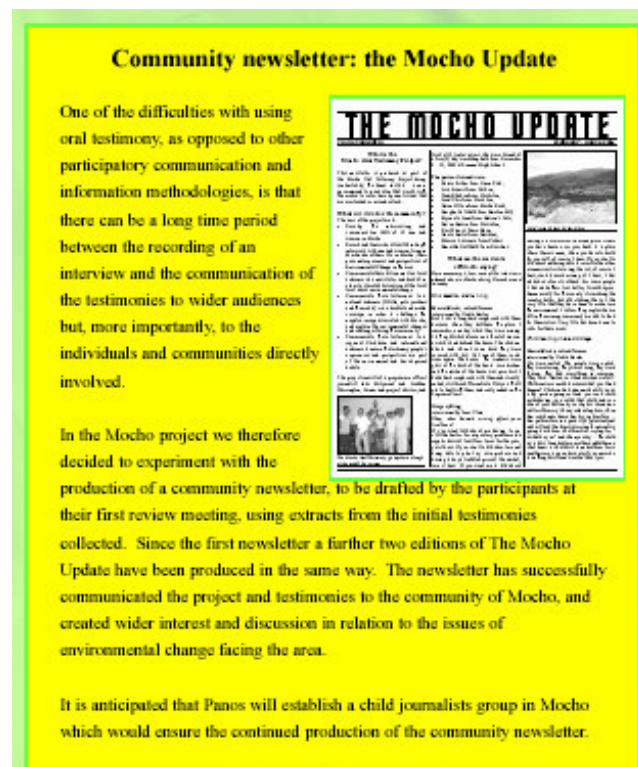
There is currently no national policy or legislation dealing specifically with climate change. Although there are seven plans/policies and nine pieces of legislation that mention climate change, there is still no clear directive driving climate change issues in Jamaica. There are huge gaps between the legislative framework and action being taken on the ground about climate change. While the National Hazard Risk Reduction Policy identifies climate change as both a global and local hazard that must be addressed, and the Ministry of Land and Environment has mentioned that a climate change unit is to be established soon, very little else seems to be happening about climate change, particularly at the community level.

The Mocho Oral Testimony project is ideally placed to drive the dialogue on community input towards climate change adaptation. Particularly potent is a recent alliance with the Red Cross of Jamaica which is also working on climate change in six communities in Jamaica. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme, which has also co-funded the Mocho Oral Testimony Project, is also another partner that is eager to drive climate change issues at the community, national and regional level. The Red Cross, Panos Jamaica, the GEF and other organisations interested in community adaptation and climate change met in September 2006 to discuss collaboration to raise and drive the issue at the government level. The Mocho experience combined with the Red Cross work can feed into a model for community development strategies for the island and the Caribbean region.

## WORKSHOP AND TESTIMONY COLLECTION

Indi McIymont-Lafayette, Panos Caribbean Programme Officer/Journalist, initially visited the community in September 2005 to share the project idea and to invite their interest and commitment to the project. Several visits were made between September and December to gain greater community input into the project design and to identify suitable participants. A trainer from the Panos London Oral Testimony Programme ran the workshop in December 2005. It was attended by six men and six women from the community. About half of the participants were teachers; the others included several unemployed students and self-employed businessmen.

The workshop covered listening and questioning skills, interview relationships and ethics, topic development and the use of recording equipment. There was also an opportunity for participants to carry out a practice interview and receive feedback on this. Participants responded positively to the workshop, they had lots to contribute on topic development and gathered some good practice interviews. One young man, who interviewed his father, described the experience: "It was wonderful... I interview-



ewed my father and it was the first time in all my 22 years that I have sat down with him and had such a good talk with him. I learnt a lot of things I didn't know." His father sadly died in September 2006, making the importance of that particular interview, in terms of the process as well as the content, even more significant.

Throughout the workshop the interviewers demonstrated a strong level of motivation for the project. In particular, they expressed a desire to communicate the key concerns and problems affecting Mocho to a wider audience, and to contribute towards changing Mocho's image throughout the rest of Jamaica. In their evaluation of the workshop participants were asked what they felt was most interesting about the project and its aims. Their responses to this question included:

*"Giving a voice to the small man."*

*"Getting the authentic views of the people."*

*"Developing our interest in climatic issues."*

*"It's good to know that the public will know that here we are a very educated bunch."*

*"Exposing the area so people can learn from it, especially the younger generation."*

*"The wider society will come to know some of the problems facing our community."*

Following the workshop each participant was asked to record and transcribe (word-for-word) three to four interviews. Halfway through the collection there was a review meeting for participants to discuss, compare, and reflect on their testimony collection experience, and for Panos London and Panos Jamaica to provide feedback to the interviewers on their interview technique and content. It was also an opportunity for the participants to discuss and draft the first edition of the community newsletter. Regular meetings with the participants followed this review meeting to maintain the momentum of the project and the commitment and interest of the interviewers, and also to draft further editions of the community newsletter.

By April 2006 the testimony collection and transcription was completed. Many of the transcripts received from participants are in patois, a dialect that is a mixture of English and African words spoken throughout Jamaica. In some testimonies this patois becomes difficult for non-Jamaicans to understand, and even some Jamaicans will have problems reading it. The transcripts will therefore require some translation before they can be disseminated to wider audiences.

## OUTCOMES

### Personal accounts of environmental and climate change

The testimonies illustrate the complexity of the environmental changes facing the community. The bauxite mining industry has had dramatic and significant impacts on people's lives and their environment.

The community has experienced several extreme weather events – most recently Hurricane Ivan. And there are also less dramatic but equally significant changes in the climate and the weather.

Within the testimonies, when people describe the changes in their environment, the three issues (mining, hurricanes, and changes in weather patterns) are interrelated. For example the changes brought about by the mining – loss of trees, reduction in the availability of productive land, and the lack of fertile soil and good drainage in the reclaimed land – place people and their livelihoods at greater risk from hurricanes and other extreme weather events, such as increased periods of drought or heavy rainfall. Also, many of those interviewed highlighted changes to the local microclimate. They describe a reduction in moisture levels and rainfall in the local area and attribute this to the reduction in local tree cover as a result of the mining.

The testimonies contain accounts of how people would better prepare for hurricanes in the future, and also how farming has altered as a result of the changes in land use brought about by the mining industry. Adaptation is an area, which could be explored further through group dialogues with members of the community, using some of



A denuded hillside in Mocho. Coal burning has been an increasing source of livelihood for some residents there.

the existing testimony material as the springboard for more focused and in-depth discussions. It could be valuable to have a focus group discussion with a group of farmers about farming, adaptation and climate change, and another discussion with homeowners and/or builders in relation to effective disaster preparedness.



A farmer shows off his tomato field.

### Selection of extracts from the testimonies

#### Unpredictable weather

"Well, at this time it is very hard to predict what kind of weather we will have to encounter daily. When the climate gets too hot or too cold, it can also restrict the growth of plants and too much water can wash away the soil or the plant or the soil can become water logged and the growth of the plants are restricted and result in low





Land slippage in Mocho.

production.” .....Fayonette, female, 46 years, teacher

### Changes in rainfall patterns

“Now, rainfall has changed and this might be as a result of global warming.

We find that in 2003 to 2004 we had eight months without any rainfall - severe drought. Prior to that in September 2003 we had so much rain, so much that places in the lower plains were flooded out... the rain as it was during the period of the 80's is no longer the same in the 90's. September through to November you could look out for long persistent rains on a daily basis, now we find that you will have rainfall once per week, maybe twice depending on the climate, right, or what is happening out in the Caribbean Basin.”

Gregory, male, 27 years, teacher

“The weather makes the farming very, very difficult because you have to depend on rain to get our crops for we don't have any irrigation water. When the rain begins to fall it just keeps falling and falling so everything ends up destroying the crops... Some-times the water comes with acids and burns the plants... and then you get all the rain one time and then for another six months you don't get any more rain. Last year was the...worst rainfall I have ever seen in my entire life since I've been here. It does affect everything because you still couldn't reap anything and the little that you have is not growing.”  
.....Harry, male, farmer

### Deforestation increases vulnerability to hurricanes

“The trees will cut the gale force winds, but when the trees are removed the wind will develop more power because there are no trees to break the force of the wind.

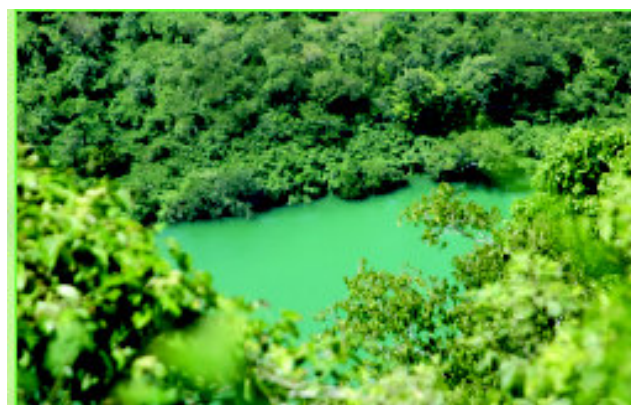
Those huge channels that the bauxite company cut through the rocks, will also allow the wind to follow it and wherever the wind exits it will tear down anything that stands in its way.”.... Samuel, male, 60, farmer

### Media Collaboration

To date, the response from the media has been good: since Panos has started work in the community four feature stories (one made the front page of the Jamaica Gleaner, the leading newspaper in Jamaica and the oldest in the English speaking Caribbean) have been published on the community and its concerns.

In one particular case the residents thanked Panos for coverage of a community meeting with the bauxite company, to which Panos had sent a reporter and also other media houses.

After the stories were broadcast, the residents received feedback from the bauxite company within two days; unusual as they usually have to wait for long periods to get any response from the company. Panos has also been documenting, through feature stories, the dialogue between the community and the bauxite company with the aim of ironing out some of the unresolved issues that the community has.



An 'unexplored' aquifer that at times causes flooding in the community.

### Community mobilization and looking ahead

The oral testimony project has served as a catalyst for greater community mobilization and this reflects a desire expressed by many of those interviewed for greater community activities and collective action.

The process of interviewing 47 members of the community and the creation and circulation of the newsletter has certainly contributed to increasing awareness of and discussion around environmental and climate change issues. People from the community are now starting to submit pieces for publication in the newsletter and there



*A farmer tends his yam field in Mocho*

is a great deal of anticipation for the publication of the booklet based on the testimonies. In September a community meeting attracted 65 men and women from Mocho to discuss the issues emerging from the testimonies and the appropriate next steps for the community to take. As a result the following activities and additional training have been planned:

Photojournalism and the environment training (October 2006)

A roving exhibition on climate change and environmental issues (November 2006)

Energy efficiency training (December 2006)

Climate change and community adaptation discussion and training (February 2007)

Looking ahead, one of the major activities in 2007 will be to develop a vulnerability and hazard assessment of the community especially in relation to climate change, in partnership with the Red Cross. This will feed into the formation of a disaster management committee and the development of a community disaster plan. Additional research will be carried out with groups particularly vulnerable to climate change, such as farmers, to see viable alternate solutions that can be implemented. In early 2007, another Jamaican community vulnerable to climate change will be identified to replicate the Mocho project.

The testimony collection has documented a wealth of knowledge and experiences on environmental change that would otherwise have been unrecorded, and it has also led to discussion and reinvigorated interest in Moc-

ho's rich history and cultural heritage. The project has generated some positive national media coverage on Mocho and its concerns. But more significantly, at this point, 10 months after the initial oral testimony workshop, it is evident that the project has initiated wider interest, enthusiasm and activism amongst the community in addressing the environmental challenges they face.

Panos Caribbean is a regional nongovernmental organisation (NGO) which seeks to empower all sectors of society to articulate their own information on development issues.

Panos Caribbean was established in 1986 in Washington, DC to help people participate in the development debate, in particular through the media. We work with poor people and various marginalised groups to build their capacity to communicate their own information and perspectives on development. This is because Panos strongly believes that development issues can only be solved if the directly affected people have a say.

Today, Panos Caribbean's main office is in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and in 2005 it opened an office in Kingston, Jamaica.

Over its 20 year history, Panos has conducted extensive training of journalists, helped the media to cover complex development issues better (through handbooks, briefings, production fellowships, events) and supported journalistic networks. Panos also provides communication/media awareness training to NGOs and communities involved in the environment, gender, children's rights and HIV and AIDS, so that they become newsmakers.

Panos Caribbean disseminates through the media feature articles, radio programmes, briefings and other media productions in four languages: French, Kreyol, English and Spanish.