

CS35: TRINIDAD & TOBAGO MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY PARTNERSHIP by Peter Garrett

Context

As part of some consultancy work he was doing for BG, the energy company, Peter Garrett visited Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago on a number of occasions in 2009, and was struck by the frequency of newspaper reports of murder and violent assaults. Following this up with questioning of people with whom he came into contact, almost everyone – including BG employees - had an account of robbery, assault, woundings or murder involving people they knew personally. Peter formed the view that as an organisation with national significance in Trinidad and Tobago (not least as a major taxpayer), and given the impact of crime on its staff, BG could and should take a national stance on the crime issue in the country, and raised this with BG's local Chief Executive. It transpired that he had previously sought to put in place an intervention of this sort, but without success. He expressed support, and agreed to provide initial funding for another attempt, with the active participation of Peter and Dialogue Associates/Prison Dialogue (PD).

Aims and Objectives

The intention of the initiative was to reduce the level of violent crime in Trinidad and Tobago (albeit beginning in a much smaller pilot area, so that the various elements of a coherent programme could be developed with a view ultimately to spreading this learning more widely in the country).

Method: Activity, Participants and Duration

The Implicate Change Model (©Dialogue Associates) was used as a framework to develop the initiative. The 'Discovery' phase entailed a series of discussions with as many as possible of the stakeholders as possible, including agencies and organisations with an established role or interest in crime reduction and public safety. These included Government departments (including the Ministry of National Security, Justice, the Defence Force, Prisons, Probation, Police, Finance, and the East Port of Spain Development Company), non-governmental organisations working in the most severely crime-afflicted areas as well as local religious and community leaders. It included meeting and

talking with three serving government Cabinet Ministers, as well visiting no-go area in East Port of Spain to meet one gang leader and various members of criminal gangs. The aim was to discover the cause of what was the highest homicide rate in the West Indies, before attempting to intervene.

Through the wide range of meetings, a consistently confirmed picture emerged of the complex mix of factors contributing to the situation. There was Trinidad's geographical location in relation to the international movement of drugs from Columbia via Venezuela (which is in sight of Trinidad) through the island to the Americas, Europe and Asia. Transshipment payments were in guns and drugs rather than money. The gangs had existing for a long time, but once they became armed the homicide rate increased exponentially. The capital punishment and the execution of key gang leaders led to a proliferation of younger gang members stepping up into the leadership vacuum and fragmenting the control and discipline of the gangs, making the less predictable and far more dangerous. There was the economic depression due in particular to the decline of the sugar cane industry, in turn resulting in a breakdown in traditional patterns of child-raising (absent fathers, mothers off to work in Florida, children raised by grandmothers), which makes children easier for the gangs to recruit. Gangs gained control of most communities in East Port of Spain, choking police intelligence and restricting work on basic services and infrastructure unless they were paid protection money. It became apparent that inter-gang warfare was responsible for over half the homicides, and that East Port of Spain was the hot bed that was exporting crime across Trinidad. This was the source area to address. At the same time, a picture also emerged of all the different agencies at work seeking to have an impact on this situation, and that their efforts were very largely uncoordinated and unaligned. The resulting 'Discovery Map' is shown in summarised form on a following page.

It was clear from the Discovery Phase that given the significance of safety and security and the criminal justice system in any attempt to improve the situation, it would be essential for BG to engage with the appropriate government departments; in discussions with the Organisation for Law Enforcement Policy (OLEP) which is part of the Ministry of National Security, it emerged that they had an existing initiative designed under the previous government which was stalled. Promisingly, it focussed on part of the East Port of Spain (the most troubled area) called Morvant-Laventille, and was

aimed at crime reduction and economic and social development. The initiative acknowledged the need for a multi-year, multi-phase approach (the phases being identified as 'relief', 'comfort' and 'reform'), and the advocates were clearly committed and realistic about the scale of the challenge. Following further discussions, BG agreed formally to partner with OLEP in the initiative. Funds were released by the government, a project manager was hired by OLEP to co-ordinate the activity, and a governance structure designed by PD composed of a Steering Group of representatives of the different branches of the Ministry of National Security and a Strategic Advisory Group of some of the key external players put in place. This was intended to provide oversight of the initiative but equally importantly to maintain the support of the various different organisations active in the arena.

This said, a key challenge was to ensure the engagement of the relevant government ministries other than the Ministry of National Security, and the involvement of the local community. BG undertook a series of discussions with the other ministries, while it was also arranged for the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, to launch the initiative formally on 7th September 2011. The CEO of BG also used this occasion to invite other business organisations in the country to participate. Separately, it was agreed to concentrate efforts on Beetham, one single area within Morvant Lavantille, where a community centre which would also accommodate police and victim support was already under construction.

With the Prime Minister's announcement there was pressure to show progress on the ground, and the initiative moved into a more active phase. Work progressed on the completion of the Beetham community centre, a project was launched to clear the blocked drains, a play park project for children was taken forward, and BG began helping in the local schools. Training sessions were held for Youth Service Officers, community engagement sessions were convened, and a number of surveys conducted. Predictably, the efforts soon ran into difficulties. It was critical given the multi-faceted nature of the problems encountered, and the changes required to address these, that the activities be co-ordinated according to a coherent plan to which all the different parties involved contributed and agreed; however, the pressure to make progress meant that the activity undertaken was largely ad hoc and driven by the immediate opportunities available and access to funding. Despite the Prime Minister's involvement it also proved difficult to ensure that

individual ministries followed through on their commitments, which led to difficulties in accessing funding and delays to different projects, including the construction of the community centre (although news reports in June 2013 announced that this would shortly be restarting, as a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Community Development, the Ministry of National Security, and the National Insurance Property Development Company Ltd).

The difficulties faced by the initiative were further complicated by changes in the mix of key players who had been most closely associated with the establishment of the intervention – including the BG CEO and the Minister of National Security, both of whom were pivotal to the initiative's success, given the degree of maturity it had achieved, which had not extended to embedding it deeply at operational levels, or to establishing effective functioning of the governance bodies. Had the CEO and the minister both continued in post, it is possible that the difficulties encountered – which were not entirely unexpected – could have been negotiated. However, their successors had much less personal stake in the success of the project, and therefore arrived in their new positions only to be confronted with an initiative which was struggling for traction. Attempts to establish a diverse senior governance group to steer the development did not materialise and with the concurrent transfers of the Minister of National Security (to Switzerland) and the BG CEO (to Tanzania), along with the transfer of each of their deputies, Dialogue Associates/PD's association with the undertaking drew to a close. It remains to be seen what may emerge over time from the formulation and passionate intent of MLI.

Outcomes

Ultimately, to date relatively little tangible progress has been achieved given the potential of this unquestionably ambitious and ground-breaking intervention. Nevertheless, some major lessons emerged from the project for the parties involved regarding the necessary ingredients for success in such multi-faceted/multi-party transformation initiatives.

Learning

Four critical success factors were identified as fundamental to the success of such a complex change initiative:

- **Sponsorship:** Appropriate and committed sponsorship from individuals in sufficiently powerful and influential positions to be able to ensure the genuine participation of all key parties in the change, and hold them to account in the event of failure to follow-through on their commitments. Holding people to account is not a national strength of Trinidadians, and this was perhaps the point of greatest weakness for MLI. Initial sponsors will inevitably in time depart the scene, and the transition to broader based ownership of the initiative, is essential to success.
- **Strategic Leadership and Planning:** Co-ordinated Strategic thinking and Planning with participation and ownership by all key parties to the changes being made is essential. This requires effective governance, visible and strong leadership, and good engagement and influencing skills. But most of all, it requires a way of involving all relevant parties. This includes the communities and gang members who will have to be instrumental in any hope of success.
- **Adaption to achieve ‘the rule of law’:** A social change programme has to be adaptive in nature as the ownership is transferred from government to the communities themselves as a common ownership of ‘the rule of law’. Forums need to be fostered to shift allegiance and to maintain ongoing alignment and cohesion across the myriad of different stakeholders and organisations involved as the initiative unfolds and evolves, and as the broader context in which the initiative takes place likewise evolves; this in particular points to the critical role of Dialogue in progressing any such complex, multi-faceted and multi-participant change initiative.
- **Dialogue Skill Transfer:** Without the transfer of Dialogue Skills through ongoing demonstration and training to underwrite alignment and common purposeful activity, the fragmented efforts of governmental and non-governmental organisations can only replicate what they have done in the past in Trinidad, which amounts to swimming against the tide and results in minimal overall progress.