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Chapter

Urban Agglomeration and the Geo-Political Status of the Municipality of Portmore, Jamaica

Carol Archer and Anetheo Jackson

Abstract

This chapter will attempt to shed light on the relevant explanations for designating or creating urban agglomeration for the purpose of administration and governance in the case of largest urban space in Jamaica. The main objective of this chapter is to provide an in-depth look at the case of Portmore with specific emphasis on the socio-economic, political, legislative, and relevant policy arrangements that influence the change in sub-national geo-political status from municipality to parish. The researchers explore the literature on local government reform, public financing, urban economics, and urban planning which provided a basis for objectively interrogating the proposed change. From the analysis of existing legislations, policies, and international conventions such as the New Urban Agenda, the proposal to change the geo-political designation of the Municipality of Portmore raises several questions about the economic profile of the area and the capacity to enjoy the benefits of urban agglomeration given its location attributes. Understanding the evolution of the theoretical discourse in urban planning can provide clarity on the relevance of this geo-political designation, the intergovernmental relationship associated with the geo-political designation, particularly as it relates to autonomy, and the allocation of resources for the provision of local government services. This understanding will help to direct the decision makers as to the best designation for Portmore given its current realities and importance of implementing measures to support decentralization and autonomy at the local level for major urban areas. The researchers found that the economic viability of the proposition is at best questionable as the economic base of the municipality is limited and its capacity to generate linkages demand serious considerations. Attention should be given to local government reform in the face of emerging trends and current realities rather than changing status of an urban areas which is the direct result of the principles of urban agglomeration.

Keywords: municipality, local government reform, urban agglomeration, decentralization, political economy, geo-political status

1. Introduction

Recently there has been raging debate regarding changing the geo-political designation of Portmore, Jamaica, from a municipality to a parish. The historical development of Portmore is intrinsically tied to Kingston. Portmore’s development began in the early seventeenth century and has developed from being a single community into a vast network of housing schemes. Some of the early communities include Queens Town, now renamed Edgewater and Port Henderson.
Queens Town was established after the 1692 earthquake, which destroyed Port Royal. This community was established as a twin city to Kingston but was destroyed by a storm surge in 1722. Since its inception, Portmore served as a dormitory of Kingston. In fact, by Jamaican government’s definition Portmore is included in the designation of the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA) and by extension an agglomeration of Kingston, the capital of Jamaica.

The major justification, for a change in geo-political status, offered by the government representatives, is that parish status would allow for greater autonomy for the elected officials from Portmore. The push for autonomy is influenced by the fact that the population and communities in Portmore increased since 2002 when the area was first designated as a municipality. As reported in the Jamaica Daily Gleaner on December 16, 2020, the communities in Portmore increased from 22 in 1991 to 40 communities in 2001 with the construction of several housing schemes, including that of Greater Portmore.

This chapter will attempt to shed light on the relevant explanations for designating or creating urban agglomeration for the purpose of administration and governance in the case of the largest urban space in Jamaica. Understanding the evolution of the theoretical discourse in urban planning and urban economics can provide a lens through which to examine the efficacy of the proposed geo-political designation, the intergovernmental relationship associated with the geo-political designation, particularly as it relates to autonomy, and the allocation of resources for the provision of local government services. This understanding will help to direct the decision makers as to the most appropriate designation for Portmore given its current realities and importance of implementing measures to support decentralization and autonomy at the local level for major urban areas.

Ebenezer Howard, pioneering urban planner, offers one of the earliest works on designation of urban areas. Howard, in his 1902 seminal writing, Garden Cities of Tomorrow, proposed the concept of town clusters [1]. Based on his research, Howard concluded that there was a dynamic relationship between the spatial organization of the cities/urban areas and the semi-urban and rural areas. Furthermore, Howard foresaw urbanized areas comprising several “garden cities around Central Cities. In his vision of the urbanized landscape, the urban form is not only the areas occupied by cities but also an area comprising several peripheral Garden Cities integrated with a Central City. Researchers Fang and Hu ([2], p. 128) argue that Howard’s concept eventually evolved into the early forms of the “Garden City” model of urban agglomeration. The growth of urbanized population in Europe, the Americas and Asia, called for further explanation of the relationship between and within these urbanized areas. Geddes [3] coined the term conurbation or continuous urbanization. Unlike Howard that predicted the growth of urban areas contained by greenbelts, Geddes [3] predicted the growth of these urban spaces without the swath of rural lands. Based on Geddes’ prediction, the British government recognized the various forms of aggregated local authority to address local land use and service delivery issues.

2. Methodology

An exploratory approach was used to examine the case of Portmore as a Municipality and the efficacy of the proposed change in the geo-political designation from a municipality to a parish. In this regard, the first objective was an in-depth look at the case of Portmore with specific emphasis on the socio-economic, political, legislative, and relevant policy arrangements.

Specifically, detailed information on the proposed change, relevant legislative documents, existing policies, available reports, and prior research were assembled and studied.
The review took account of the existing context of the Municipality of Portmore and its connection to the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA), details of the current and proposed geo-political arrangement, the rationale for the proposed changed and the readiness of Portmore for the proposed change from municipality to parish status. In addition to this, economic roles, and functions of the Municipality of Portmore in relation to the neighboring urban centers, the academic literature on local government reform, public financing, urban economics, and urban planning provided a basis for objectively interrogating the proposed change. This also informed the analysis and discussion of the existing fiscal relationships between the local authorities and central government and narrow down key considerations for the government and key stakeholders in determining the way when considering changing sub-national geo-political status. The existing legislative and policy environments and the implications for sustainable development also guided the study.

3. Urban agglomeration/economies and geo-political designation

One of the most recent discourses on geo-political treatment of large, urbanized areas is presented by Fang [4]. Fang suggests that urban agglomerations are very different from the simple clustering of similar administrative units or geographic location. Instead, urban agglomeration is an emerging urban spatial form that is driven by concentrated industries and populations, a highly connected transportation network, an enhanced central city and favorable regional incentive policies. Urban agglomerations are evidently a product of the late stages of metropolitan development. Furthermore, “one can only claim that there is an urban agglomeration when the networks grow in strength and frequency and the socioeconomic ties among the central and peripheral cities become more integrated Fang and Hu ([2], p. 133).

Cities are characterized by urban agglomeration as there exists agglomeration economies. Agglomeration economies are generally either pecuniary or technological in nature [5]. These are resource advantages. The former can result from a large and diverse labor market. Thus, firms in the KMA that rely on Portmore for its labor supply can enjoy greater productivity through lower labor and transportation costs due to proximity to work and stronger competition for jobs. This is of major consideration when other urban areas such as May Pen or Old Harbor are considered (see Map showing designated towns and areas in Jamaica). Portmore is one of the largest residential settlements in Jamaica and the English-speaking Caribbean. It is also one of the fastest growing urban areas in the island. However, as aforementioned, Portmore has been a dormitory for Kingston. Its main pull factors are proximity to Kingston and its affordable housing stock, in comparison to the KMA.
Technological agglomeration economies result from knowledge spill-over across and within industries. It implies thicker upstream and downstream linkages between economic activities in an urban area. To capitalize on these economies, local governments, with the autonomy to design and attract the right kind of industries will most likely promote the appropriate mix of land uses and production linkages that will trap the benefits of knowledge sharing and the cross-fertilization of ideas, inputs, and outputs, that will maximize returns to firms and by extension to the locality.

Presently, in the Municipality of Portmore, the leading sources of private-sector income are retail and services. There is also a fairly recent trend of a growing number of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) firms in the Municipality. In addition to this, the steady demand for housing in the area stimulates growth in new outputs of housing and commercial properties. However, the strength of linkages between these economic activities is questionable. For example, there is no evidence of strategic clustering of industries and spatial concentration of suppliers, supply chains, complementary industries, and local institutions to maximize on locational competitiveness [6].

In fact, it is arguable that the informal economic activities in the area perform fairly well in establishing linkages when compared to the formal activities. It must be noted that although the informal sector is a source of employment and income for many residents, it is not a source of revenue for the government. Further, with the exception of the Municipality’s fishing industry, these informal economic activities are diverse and very difficult to locate. Strategic clustering in any urban agglomeration is significant as land use patterns are substantial to the maximization of the benefits of agglomeration economies.

A further consideration is the potential intercity dynamics—The economic competition between Kingston and Portmore. If Portmore fails to create and supply the jobs to match its endowment of labor, the region will continue to serve as a dormitory for Kingston’s labor input. An alternative arrangement to serving as a dormitory is for Portmore to use its labor supply as a source of competitive advantage to attract the type and quantity of productive activities to the area. According to Reilly’s [7] law of gravitation the capacity of two cities to attract retail spending from the catchment area in between them is dependent on the size and the square of the distance from any location between the two cities. However, while large population and labor supply is a potent pull factor for firms, the existing spending power in the locality is also an important consideration. Arguably, higher income cities are more likely to attract higher income residents which makes them more attractive to both large and small businesses. Harvey and Jowsey [8] noted that:

> consideration has to be given to the composition of the population (for example, by age group and working proportion), its earning capacity (for example, whether they are skilled workers), government subsidy policy within the district and the spending habits of different income groups (Harvey and Jowsey [8], p. 97).

When these are taken account of, the pull-factor of a more affordable housing stock in Portmore which makes housing more accessible to residents in lower income groups, may not necessarily translate to making the area more attractive to more businesses. Therefore, Portmore’s current ability to attract the kind of economic activities in the quantities that will generate linkages and capitalize on economies, and which will provide job opportunities for its residents is questionable.

As mentioned earlier, Portmore lacks the level of diversity in economic activities and the type of upstream and downstream linkages to fully capitalize on the
benefits of agglomeration economies that will likely be needed for the economic viability of the area if it is designated as a parish. However, other considerations include the quality and quantity of its urban infrastructure and services, particularly when compared to neighboring areas. Local governments in Jamaica and throughout the world are preoccupied with identifying the necessary funding to address these issues. It is likely to be more challenging should Portmore be designated parish, to generate the necessary resources to support the demand on its resources which would necessitate increasing investments in some public goods and services and land resources.

The prospects of maximizing scale economies in Portmore will likely depend on intensifying land use in the area. However, given the relatively inelastic supply of land for the various uses in the area, more intensive use will invariably take the form of high-rise developments. High-rise development is the most likely response to increased demand for residential or commercial properties in more urbanized areas where suitable land is relatively scarce. On this point, Portmore's geographical location makes it vulnerable to natural disasters. Consequently, building sound and resilient high-rise structures are likely to be costly. Whereas the land input may be minimized, the capital input would likely be substantial, such that these developments would not be feasible if the cost of capital is not sufficiently low.

Further, if the designation of parish results in altering the land use patterns in Portmore in pursuit of agglomeration economies, through a larger, more diversified economic base, then as mentioned earlier, the demand for services, facilities and urban infrastructure will likely increase. Any foreseeable increase demand on the services and infrastructure must be matched by the revenues generated by economic activities in the area. For this to be feasible, the marginal benefits from additional users in the area should equate the change in costs for the provision of public goods and services by the local government. Public goods are non-rivalry and non-excludable and cannot be efficiently allocated through the market mechanism. These include some levels of school and educational facilities, safety and security services, access to and maintenance of recreational facilities and markets, sewers and sanitation, public health facilities, and roads.

It must be noted, that in countries with decentralized governments, the market could be relied upon to smooth out differences in the marginal costs and benefits of the changes that may accompany a change in the geo-political designation from a municipality to a parish. However, even in a democratic society, as long as central governments have a high level of autonomy over revenues and the sources of income, local governments are not empowered to make the necessary adjustments to manage its provision of public goods and services. This generally results in sub-optimal allocations at the local level. Therefore, the designation of parish may be accompanied by increased fiscal responsibility but not necessarily by the level of autonomy and financial independence of the local government that is needed to avoid welfare loss to its residents.

To evaluate the extent of their financial independence if the designation is changed to parish, Portmore's local government should assess the following:

1. The amount of actual revenue from taxes and fees that will be available to the local authority.
2. The extent and efficiency of its sources of income.
3. The real power and methods by which the local government can influence increase in fees to cover rising costs.
4. The possibility of incurring debt as part of financial autonomy and financial management.

5. The strength and size of the economic base of the locality.

6. Level of diversity in economic activities of the locality.

With the proposed change of the geo-political designation of the area, the arrangements for financing of, for example, public goods and services will necessarily be changed. Thus, the amount of actual revenue from taxes and fees and how these would be allocated to the newly established parish are pertinent to the decision. It must be noted that property taxes and council fees are the primary sources of revenue for local governments in Jamaica. However, property tax rates are set by central government and it is calculated on the unimproved land value, the buildings are not taxed. Consequently, increased tax revenues to the local authority are largely dependent on the demand for land. A noteworthy point on this topic is that the costly re-valuation exercise that is required to capture gains from appreciation in property value, is arguably not undertaken as often as is needed for local governments to capture its share of the gains in property value that is needed to finance investments in public goods and services to support residents and businesses in the area. In fact, disinvestment, and a lack of maintenance of public goods and services by local governments as they rely on this income to cover some of these costs is not far-fetched.

4. Political economy and urban agglomeration

The corollary of the foregoing is that alongside the potential benefits of parish designation touted by government officials, decision-makers are tasked to take an objective look at the Municipality’s opportunities to expand and deepen its economic activities to cover both internal and external costs. This objective evaluation should include serious considerations as to whether or not the type, size and diversity of current and potential economic activities in Portmore can sufficiently capture the benefits of agglomeration economies and what changes will be made to empower the local government to manage the fiscal affairs of the proposed parish.

In Jamaica, as in most developed country that have adopted a market driven economy, the bulk of funding for local government services is appropriated by Central government. The assumption behind central government’s control of funding for local services has been influenced by the notion of achieving economies of scale and efficiency in the delivery of these services.

For a small island state such as Jamaica, with a parliamentary system almost akin to a unitary form of government, centrally controlled funding for local government services might seem logical at first. However, further examination of income and expenditure at the local level reveals that services are duplicated across agencies and there are no clear lines of accountability towards the allocation of these funds. Historically there has been a “tug-of war” between the national government and the local authority about who should bear the cost for delivering services. Central to the conflict is the control of powers. The central government wants to maintain control and access to revenues which are generated at the local level. In Jamaica, like any other modern democracy there is the tension between the nation state and local authorities, as the officials at the local level become more concerned with increasing their share of powers and resources vis-à-vis the claims of other localities and the national state ([9], p. 35).
There are several treatises on local government reform which Jamaica can adopt to carry out the much-needed reform. One line of argument, at the broader macro level, placed the discourse into two camps: neo-Marxist left and the neo-conservative right. The neo-Marxist argues that growth and decline at the local level, particularly in the urban areas is influenced by decisions made at the national level as a function of economic forces [9]. The neo-conservatives believe that decisions at the local level should be left to ‘invisible’ force of the market and those local areas that can grow as a result will do so. Central to both lines of arguments is that national government can and does influence the growth and decline of local municipalities. This is the main point carried by political economists.

Another theory on local government reform, while arguing from the perspective of market forces, introduces a more complex variable, that of globalism. According to Clarke [10] “global economic change process general transcend scale, yet in some instances are very sensitive to local contextual factors, including state actions” ([10], p. 12). According to Clarke, local officials over the world operate under heightened conditions of economic and political uncertainty. They have new social and economic roles and responsibilities that are unanticipated. Local officials must reconstruct relations between public and private sector at the local level, in the context of the “new globalism” in addition to concentrating on providing the most basic governance issues.

Proponents of the “new global reality of local government” further argue that to the extent that the legitimacy of democratic regimes is tied to economic performance rather than governance based on civic values, the new localized state suggest a subordination of political will to private interest, particularly at the local level. Furthermore, democratization trends at the national level have left unclear the autonomy of local government relative to other ties. Local governments are victims of structural adjustment programmers in developing countries, national government focus on complying with international debt programmer rather than providing financial and administrative resources for the delivery of local services.

Attempts have been made at redistributing local influence. This is evidence by increased participation of the citizenry in the decision-making process. However, full participation is hampered by the fact that those who tend to “benefit” from the new privatization of services is the party ‘faithful’s’ and the often-gained new position of influence in newly privatized local government. Local government’s inability to carry out new roles and functions are constrained by “poor capital” and uneven development patterns. Uneven allocation restricts the ability of local governments to compete for new private investment.

New localism generates extensive competition among states and between local areas. This heightened level of competition has been known to exacerbate uneven development. In this era of globalism, local leaders must now move in a decision-making arena where pivotal investors operate at global scales, and at a magnitude and pace that defies local involvement. However, local leaders are asked to perform in this market as entrepreneurs under public constraints. National government also influences local leaders’ performance in the global context.

The national government is wary of the fiscal and political consequences of proactive local development efforts. The local decision makers are also limited by the knowledge base and skills to act as public entrepreneurs. In the past local councilors were tied to their local context and the skills there are less likely to transfer when dealing in a global context. Schoburg [11] supports this position. She argues that most local government authority in Jamaica are hampered by an organizational framework built on values that are no longer compatible with contemporary leadership and management technologies or development norms. Furthermore, the
operations of local government in the Caribbean and in Jamaica specifically, lack a
culture of high performance ([11], p. 19).

Peterson [12] also acknowledged constraints associated with local government. He is of the view that local governments are limited by their ability to implement and redistribute policies or social welfare type policies. These local decision-makers fear that this would encourage the movement of capital. Instead, local decision-makers are likely to seek out developmental policies that serve to increase local capital base. In their view, this represents a maximization of “the public interest.”

Stone [13], among others, expanded Peterson’s argument by pointing out that the political culture of the locality also plays a significant role in the policies developed for that locality. The influence of political culture is most evident in policy making at the local government level here in Jamaica.

Recognizing the limitations associated with resource mobilization, local governments have opted to privatize the provision of certain services. Theories of privatizing local government services have also influenced the discourse on local government reform. Boyne [14] in his analysis of local government reform in Great Britain, points out that since the 1980s there has been efforts to privatize government services. This effort of privatizing is driven by the belief that the market can produce goods and services more efficiently. It is also driven by the belief that resource decisions are seen as more rational when left to individuals who choose alternatives based on their own preferences through a market bidding process. Market like disciplines will prevent consumers of public goods and services from over consuming their services and smooth out inefficiencies in the provision of these goods and services.

The historical overview of local government reform in Great Britain, provided by Boyne [14] mirrored that of Jamaica. Boyne notes that in Great Britain, local authorities have been shaped by central government into service providers whose primary role lies in supplementing the welfare state rather than economic production.

The industrialists shaped municipal policies to give their businesses the competitive edge. As large companies expanded, they began to focus on national and international base of power and gave limited attention to local politics. The national government oftentimes step in and control the provision of infrastructure and social services. In the 1980s, like Great Britain, there was restricted funding for local government in Jamaica. To address funding constraints, the more independent local government in Great Britain developed strategies for economic development. Greater London Council and the more radical councils developed schemes for allocating funds to stimulate local businesses.

In Great Britain, the Local Government Reform Act of 1980 forced local authorities to operate many services as if they were private companies without the capacity to generate a trading loss for a few years or to expand their business through national or international trade. Under this Act, local authorities could not use power to expand entrepreneurial skills to expand into markets other than those directly tied to the needs of the local authority. In other words, the local authorities were limited by Central government.

Hero [15] introduced a departure from the market-centered approach theory to local government reform. He criticized efforts to evaluate local government solely in terms of the empirical distribution of concrete goods and services. People must be placed in the equation. Hero states that the value of ordinary individuals should be measured by the degree to which “outputs” of the system, in the form of security services and material support benefit them ([10], p. 41). Unfortunately, Hero’s suggestions were not taken into consideration until in the 1990s in Great Britain and New Zealand. In the 1990s, under the leadership of Prime Minister Blair, the “Best
Value” system was introduced as a means of ensuring effective and efficient service delivery. This system set targets for local authorities. Included in these targets is a strong customer service component.

In general, existing research on local government reform points to the influence of global economic forces. These forces limit the decision-making capacity of local government, particularly as it relates to economic development. This also impact on service delivery. Although the local authorities are constrained by global forces, the average taxpayers are still concerned about effective and efficient delivery of local services such as fire, sanitation, and provision of social services.

In Jamaica there is an increasing demand for efficient and effective service delivery. With this demand there is a tendency to argue for prioritizing some of these services as a means of achieving these goals. Walker and Davis [16] have conducted extensive research on impact on contracting government services in Great Britain. They argue that services that are easily defined, monitored, and for which appropriate measures for performance can be implemented are the best to be contracted. They also warned that the difficulty in contracting service the recipients (taxpayers) do not often get the best possible service but rather the best service according to the contract.

The promulgation of the various Acts governing local government inclusive of the Parish Council Acts of 1887, the Parochial Rate and Finance Act of 1990, the Kingston and St. Andrew Act of 1925 and Municipal Act of 2003, and most recently the Local Governance Act of 2016, among others, serve to further blur the distinction between the provision of and funding for services at local and central government levels. Increasingly, research on local government recognizes that the powers of national or central government have increased significantly since the 1960s. The central government have assumed more interest in maintaining order and authority at the local level as well as securing public revenues and preserving the interest of public officials in pursuit of the government overall goals relating to growth and development.

In Jamaica, as in other developing states, government spending on public service delivery at the local government level has seen a mercuric rise since the 1980s. Concomitant with this increase in spending, central government has increased its regulatory powers and the decision-making authority have become more centralized. This is evident by the passage of various acts of parliament to centralize funding mechanisms. This is with the aim to achieve economies of scale, eliminate duplication of services and increase service efficiency.

The emphasis on market driven forces to influence the provision of and funding for local government services also served to blur the lines between the responsibilities of local and central government to provide these services. However, Gurr and King [9] argue that “the provision of such public services as water supply, for protection and waste management cannot be left up to the market neither can it be the sole responsibility of one layer of government” Gurr and King ([9], p. 33). According to Gurr and King, “Whatever other interest is pursued by the national government, some minimum level of the public services must be provided if the local authority is to survive at all” Gurr and King, ([9], p. 35).

Ragoonath [17], in his essay, “Challenges for Local Government in the Caribbean” is of the view that Jamaica and other Small Island Developing States of the region is faced with issues of rebuilding credibility to a local government system. The rebuilding is necessary since for many years local government structures of the region has been “‘hijacked’ and even emasculated by central governments, and at the same time being an arena for corruption and mismanagement, all in the context of self-interest, political expediency and even party paramount.” ([17], p. 100). To remedy the situation Ragoonath calls for, reform of the legislative and
the administrative structures in order that participation is enhanced, and citizens are empowered. He further argued that such reform must be because of consensus. Consensus will only come after consultation, and when trust is developed or inculcated. Moreover, the opinions of those at the bottom must be considered, alongside all other opinions [17].

5. Urban agglomeration, legislative provisions, policies, and implications for sustainable development

In justifying the proposed geo-political parish status for Portmore, a newly elected government official representing Portmore stated that,

as a model parish, Portmore has the potential to counter a lot of the ills that ail most parishes: Particularly the blight spawned by unplanned developments and the resulting urban sprawl. The orderly development and zoning of the parish is of tremendous value in making Portmore the parish to live, work and do business. The creation of high-occupancy vehicle lanes at the tolls to encourage carpooling and reduce traffic and pollution; the creation of a model inter- and intra-parish public transportation system; the provision of designated public markets and strict enforcement of vending rules; a modern waste disposal and sewage treatment systems are all potentially practical benefits of parish status. Miller (2020), “Practical Benefits of Portmore As a Parish, Friday, January 29, 2021, Jamaica Gleaner https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20210129/robert-miller-practical-benefits-portmore-parish.

It is important to note that the existing Town and Country Planning Act (1957) and other legislative provisions make allowances for the Portmore Municipality and the other parishes to prepare its land use plan to address issues of urban blight, transportation, and settlement needs. Unfortunately, in this statement, the elected official failed to recognize these existing legislations and failed to mention the enabling legislative enactments and or policies and programmers that will be implemented for the Jamaican society to achieve the principles of sustainable development as measured by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 11—safe, inclusive, and resilient cities and communities. Elsewhere in Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean and throughout the world, elected officials at the city level, policy makers, and city planners are actively working to create environmentally friendly, safe, and resilient communities, neighborhoods, and cities for their citizens without compromising the needs of the future generation.

The current administration in Jamaica must take care to adhere to the principles of the agreement under the New Urban Agenda which is the Framework for the implementation of SDG 11. By signing the New Urban Agenda, the government agreed to:

1. Support appropriate policies and capacities that enable subnational and local governments to register and expand their potential revenue base, while ensuring that poor households are not disproportionately affected.

2. Promote sound and transparent systems for financial transfers from national governments to subnational and local governments based on the latter’s needs, priorities, functions, mandates, and performance-based incentives, as appropriate, to provide them with adequate, timely and predictable resources and enhance their ability to raise revenue and manage expenditures.
3. Support the development of vertical and horizontal models of distribution of financial resources to decrease inequalities across subnational territories, within urban centres and between urban and rural areas, as well as to promote integrated and balanced territorial development.

4. Provide the transparency of data on spending and resource allocation as a tool for assessing progress towards equity and spatial integration.

5. Promote best practices to capture and share the increase in land and property value generated because of urban development processes, infrastructure projects and public investments. Measures such as gains-related fiscal policies could be put in place, as appropriate, to prevent its solely private capture, as well as land and real estate speculation.

6. Support the creation of robust legal and regulatory frameworks for sustainable national and municipal borrowing, based on sustainable debt management, supported by adequate revenues and capacities, by means of local creditworthiness as well as expanded sustainable municipal debt markets when appropriate.

To ensure that the government is not in breach of the New Urban Agenda and is able to achieve the SDGs, it is imperative that the necessary steps are taken to further enact the recommendations of the National Advisory Committee on Local Government Reform. The detailed Report prepared by the National Advisory Committee on Local Government Reform in 2009 for the government of Jamaica, recommend urgent need to reform the local government and governance structures to ensure sustainable development for Jamaica as a Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

In addition, the Report, among other things, proposed a legal framework that makes local government relevant to current realities and emerging trends regarding local governance and conducive to the achievement of good governance, sustainable development, empowerment of communities, and the active participation of citizens in the local governance process. In essence, the Report encourage decentralized local services provision, revenue collection and decision-making.

These recommendations in the Report are in keeping with several global think tanks approach to decentralization. Chief among them is the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment. The World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment proposes the following definition: ‘decentralization consists of the transfer of powers, responsibilities and resources from central government to sub-national governments, defined as separated legal entities elected by universal suffrage and having some degree of autonomy.’ This is in line with the view that the level of autonomy of the local government is critical to the decision about the proposed change in the geo-political designation of the Municipality of Portmore.

6. Conclusion

The proposal to change the geo-political designation of the Municipality of Portmore raises several questions about the economic profile of the area and the capacity to enjoy the benefits of urban agglomeration given its location attributes. The efficacy of the proposal was also considered against the background of the competitive advantage of the locality when compared to competing urban spaces,
the political economy arrangements, and the legislative and policy environment to support this change. The economic viability of the proposition is at best questionable as the economic base of the municipality is limited and its capacity to generate linkages demand serious considerations. The change would most likely be accompanied by more intensive land use if this can be achieved without compromising the goals of sustainable development. Furthermore, many of these services are funded in part by several agencies but there is no clear picture of the total amount being allocated for these services. A reporting mechanism which emphasizes the services rather than the agency or Ministry will give a clearer picture of how much is being allocated for the particular service.

Another recommendation to ensure clearer understanding of the delivery of the public services is to develop clearer performance measures and a reporting format that is intrinsic to the whole process of the service being delivered. This includes, the management, planning, monitoring and evaluation of the service. Well defined and easily measured goals reported in a concise manner will help the decision makers and the general public has a better understanding of how the public purse is being spent towards the delivery of these services. These clear structures will help decision makers and the average citizens to determine the most appropriate urban agglomeration and the attendant government and governance structure. It is important for local government to concentrate on service delivery and get the necessary support from central government to support these service deliveries rather than an “upgrade” parish status without the requisite autonomy for expanding it economic base for improve service delivery.

Decision-makers are of the view that Portmore’s has the potential to attract the kind of economic activities in the quantities that will generate linkages and capitalize on economies, and which will provide job opportunities for its residents without acknowledging that the municipality’s current position is based on the relationship that exist within the network provided by the Kingston urban agglomeration. For Portmore to exist above or outside of the existing agglomeration, there is need for the appropriate mix of land uses and production linkages that will trap the benefits of knowledge sharing and the cross-fertilization of ideas, inputs, and outputs, that will expand returns to firms and by extension to the locality. Review of the draft land use plans for the Municipality of Portmore does not suggest that consideration is given to land use management that increase the return on investment to enable the provision of basic urban services.

It is also evident that central government in Jamaica continues to maintain autonomy over revenues and the sources of income and local government at the parish level are not empowered to make the necessary adjustments to manage its provision of public goods and services. As a result, the designation of parish may be accompanied by increased fiscal responsibility but not necessarily by the level of autonomy and financial independence of the local government that is needed for the area to grow at the same level or rate of the larger metropolitan area. More emphasis is needed to make local government relevant to current realities and emerging trends regarding local governance and conducive to the achievement of good governance, sustainable development, empowerment of communities, and the active participation of citizens in the local governance process rather than changing status of an urban areas which is the direct result of the principles of urban agglomeration.
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Author details

Carol Archer* and Anetheo Jackson
University of Technology, Kingston, Jamaica

*Address all correspondence to: carcher@utech.edu.jm
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