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RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

takes aim at

CHESWICK, ST. THOMAS



PHOTO CAPTION: Pictured from left are Councillor Michael McLeod of the Dalvey Division; Member of Parliament for St. Thomas East, Dr. Michelle Charles; Honourable Desmond McKenzie, Minister of Local Government and Community Development; Mayor of Morant Bay, Councillor Hubert Williams; Miss Karen Cameron of Morant Construction Works Limited and Acting Chief Executive Officer of the St. Thomas Municipal Corporation, Miss Tameika Small.

The Rural Development Programme is now taking aim at the community of Cheswick in St. Thomas where an integrated programme will modernise it and improve infrastructure and services.

To date, some \$112.8 million has been earmarked by the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development to undertake projects in the community. Emphasis will also be placed on social protection with the construction of eight housing solutions in Cheswick under the Indigent Social Housing Programme.

“Eight persons have been identified and interviews have been done and it is estimated that \$60m will be spent to construct housing solutions for these persons,” Portfolio Minister Desmond McKenzie announced recently.

“...Assessment of the area found a number of persons who are registered in the Poor Relief system of Local Government are living in poverty and even below the poverty line.”

Twenty million dollars has already been expended in Cheswick to rewire houses for connection to the Jamaica Public Service (JPS) grid.

“One of the main features of the Rural Development Programme is to install electricity so that communities like Cheswick can have access to JPS power,” explained the Minister.

He also used the occasion to announce additional projects for the St. Thomas community. The Ministry’s Technical Unit and the St. Thomas Municipal Corporation were also tasked to complete the Cheswick Community Centre building at a cost of \$20m.

“I saw a half-finished building and I was told that it was supposed to be a community centre for Cheswick. We are going to complete the construction of the community centre” the Minister added. “I am giving the charge that I would love to go back before the end of this calendar year to hand over the centre.”

A \$12.8m contract was also signed on July 18 for the rehabilitation of Hill Sixty Road in Cheswick between representatives of the Ministry and FSC Construction Works Limited. The rehabilitation is being funded by the Ministry’s Equalization Fund.

“The reason why as a Government we have been doing as much as we’ve been doing, and especially for rural development is because of the economic stability and the steady hands of government.”

The RDP was announced in 2021 and is focused on upgrading targeted rural spaces and their infrastructure. Work is on in earnest in Chambers Pen, Hanover - the pilot project - where more than \$228m is being spent to update and revive the area.



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CHASE Fund to donate two ambulances to Local Gov’t Ministry

SANTA CRUZ, St. Elizabeth: The Culture, Health, Arts, Sports and Education (CHASE) Fund has donated two ambulances to the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development to boost the emergency medical services at its infirmaries.

Minister Desmond McKenzie in disclosing the partnership, stated that the St. Elizabeth Infirmary in Santa Cruz will benefit from one of the vehicles.

“An ambulance, fully equipped, is important for the survival of this facility. We continue to make significant investments in our infirmaries. The Government will not spare anything at all to ensure that our infirmaries are in good working order,” he said during a tour of the St. Elizabeth Infirmary on June 21.

The Minister McKenzie explained that having a dedicated unit ensures prompt, life-saving medical assistance for the facility’s 49 residents – 27 males and 22 females, as the infirmary is “miles away” from the nearest hospital.

According to Mayor of Black River, Councillor Derrick Sangster, the ambulance will provide essential support during emergencies and ensure the safety and well-being of the residents.

“The infirmary is located some distance from the hospital, but even more so, in times of hurricane, we have to make arrangements with private individuals to transport the residents to other locations should the infirmary become inundated with storm water,” he said.

“So, the ambulance will be a welcome addition to the infirmary to assist in that sort of process.”

Assistant Matron at the St Elizabeth Infirmary, Veronica Roach, noted that the ambulance will bring hope and assurance for the residents and staff alike.

Meanwhile, Minister McKenzie said that plans are underway for the opening of the new administrative block at the infirmary.

“I am really impressed with the work that the Matron and the team have been doing to maintain this facility,” added Minister McKenzie.

He stressed that the therapeutic park at the St. Elizabeth Infirmary, established in 2019 as the first of its kind, offers a serene environment for relaxation and serves as a place of healing for the residents.

McKenzie said that similar parks are being introduced in other infirmaries across the island, with Manchester, St. James and St. Mary Infirmaries already completed. Therapeutic parks at the Hanover and St. Catherine Infirmaries are under construction.





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PM opens new Male Ward at Westmoreland Infirmary

SAVANNA-LA-MAR, Westmoreland: Prime Minister Andrew Holness opened the new J\$53 million male ward at the Westmoreland Infirmary in Savanna-la-Mar on April 26.

The new building, which can house up to 50 residents, is a collaboration between the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) and the National Housing Trust (NHT).

“My administration is committed to ensure that all our infirmaries are renovated so that the conditions are suitable for the residents and for caregivers. It is important that caregivers have a comfortable and decent environment to perform their duties,” said PM Holness during his keynote address at the official ceremony.

He also told the gathering that the Government will do more spend on social programmes in the upcoming fiscal year to protect the most vulnerable and the poor.

“I want to take this opportunity to commit the Administration to doing more in the next Budget. We have increased this Budget as well, but in the Budget to come we must make a special effort to focus resources on the most vulnerable and the poor,” Mr. Holness explained.

“The reason why I am saying this is that the pandemic has disrupted our trajectory. I don’t believe that the country has fully internalised the effect of the pandemic and that one of the most [telling] impacts of the pandemic is inflation...(and) the people who are affected most by inflation are the poor.”

He said the COVID-19 pandemic brought hardships on the lives of many Jamaicans, especially the less fortunate, and that the Government has an obligation to assist.

The Prime Minister further stated that the Government must deliberately ramp up its support.

“So, your Government is actively thinking about that strategy. And, hopefully, when we come to read our next Budget, we will have some good news about how we’re going to support our most vulnerable who have been impacted... but in tangible ways, not just unconditional cash transfers.”

Honourable Desmond McKenzie, Portfolio Minister for MLGRD, in his remarks said the new ward “represents a significant investment” to enhance the lives of the most vulnerable in the society. The J\$53m price tag includes the cost for the new building, a sewage system for the infirmary property and furniture for the ward. The building is easily accessible for persons with disabilities and comprises a dormitory, doctor’s office, bathrooms, nurse’s station, and a treatment room for physiotherapy services.

The Ministry’s collaboration with the NHT also resulted in new wards being built at the Manchester, Portland, and St. James Infirmaries as well as a matron’s quarters in Westmoreland and an administrative building at the St. Elizabeth Infirmary. The joint venture under which J\$200m was spent also included the installation of solar water heaters at five infirmaries in Manchester, Portland, St. Elizabeth, St. Mary, and St. Thomas.



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Falmouth gets Homeless Shelter

FALMOUTH, Trelawny: A new J\$25 million homeless shelter that will provide temporary shelter, meals, and bathroom amenities for the homeless citizens of Falmouth and its environs is now opened.

The Falmouth Homeless Shelter was officially opened on May 5 by the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Honourable Desmond McKenzie.

The shelter, which is the first such facility outside of the Corporate Area, is located on the same premises as the Trelawny Drop-in Centre, which was opened by the Government in 2020.

“The doors of these facilities must never be closed to these persons who are in need of our help,” said the Minister.

“A lot of these persons living on our streets, some of them their families have put out, some of them leave rural areas go to Kingston, or leave the hills of Trelawny and come into Falmouth, didn’t find what they were looking for, have nowhere to go and end up on the street.”

The shelter was constructed to house up to 20 persons at a time – 14 males and six females. Minister McKenzie also urged the clients of

the new facility to preserve the shelter and behave accordingly when accessing the services.

“Regardless of the circumstances that brought them to our streets, it is not our responsibility to abuse them, and I want to challenge the people of Falmouth and the surrounding communities to be a part of this crusade that speaks to protecting, caring and most importantly, respecting these people for who they are and not where they are living,” he added.

The Mayor of Falmouth, Councillor Collen J. Gager, thanked the Minister for commitment to ensure that the facility was constructed, and to protect the island’s most vulnerable citizens.

“It warms my heart to witness this opening, even as we still celebrate the opening of the drop-in centre. The streets of Falmouth have its fair share of people who just need someone or some place to cater to them. I am happy for this facility which provides shelter for the homeless at night.”

There were also commendations for the Roads and Works staff at the Trelawny Municipal Corporation, who spearheaded the construction of the shelter, under the guidance of the Ministry’s Technical Team.



Infirmaries to get trained psychiatrists this financial year

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) is moving to employ psychiatric nurses in infirmaries across Jamaica as it provides residents with mental health support.

Portfolio Minister, Honourable Desmond McKenzie says the government-operated facilities will have a trained member of staff during this financial year.

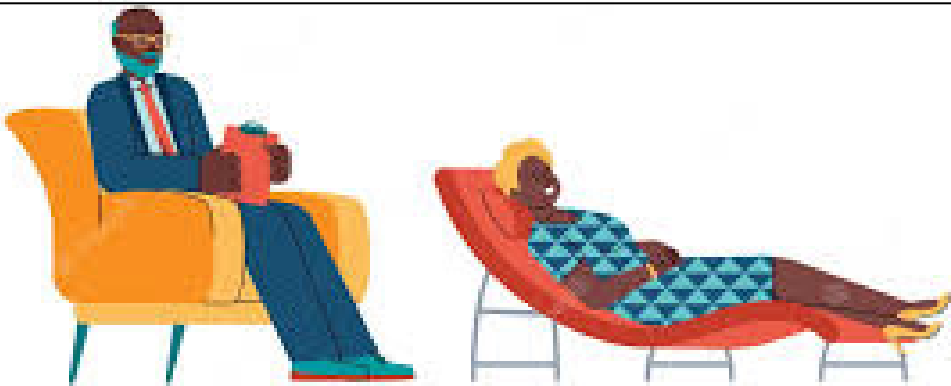
The MLGRD has responsibility for the Board of Supervision, which oversees the Poor Relief Programme that tends to persons

unable to provide for themselves. The clientele includes some who are institution -alized and live in the infirmaries; others living on their own; and the homeless.

“We are moving to add an additional complement of staffing support, and that is for the first time in our infirmaries a member of staff will be trained as a psychiatric nurse in dealing with the problems of mental health and other social cases that are in our infirmaries,” the Minister said at the official opening of the Falmouth Homeless Shelter in Trelawny on May 5.



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“This is a first for infirmaries in Jamaica and it comes under this administration.”

Minister McKenzie added that while COVID-19 containment measures implemented at the infirmaries were generally successful, including the suspension of visitations, they have created mental stress among residents.

“Mental health is a serious problem because not all the persons who work within the facilities are trained to deal with mental-health cases,” he noted.

“I remember going to an infirmary, and I saw where they had to lock away three or four of the residents in an area by themselves because of the mental-health challenge that they posed.”

Training infirmary staff in psychiatry is one of several initiatives that the MLGRD is employing to improve the quality of life for

those in state care. There is also an ongoing effort to ensure infirmaries across the country have access to ambulances. The local government ministry is working with the Culture, Health, Arts, Sports, and Education (CHASE) Fund on this.

“We have many infirmaries that are operating without these services. An ambulance is a very important part of the requirements, and I am pleased to announce that the parishes of St Elizabeth and Portland will benefit shortly from two brand new ambulances that will be provided by the CHASE Fund,” the Minister noted.

The restriction on visitors to the infirmaries was lifted on April 1 with special protocols to safeguard the residents.

Visits were suspended visits as well as the admission of new residents, and field trips for residents in a bid to stem the spread of the virus during the height of the pandemic.



Local Gov’t Minister announces new market for Yallahs

KINGSTON, Jamaica: Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Honourable Desmond McKenzie, has announced that a new market facility will be built at the site of the former Yallahs Market in St. Thomas.

At the same time, he has dismissed reports that a jerk centre is to be constructed on this land.

“I am aware of the reports to the effect that the site of the former Yallahs Market will be used to establish a jerk centre. I want to make it very clear that no consideration has been made or permission granted for any such venture,” he said in a press release.

“On the contrary, I am announcing that at the end of the current lease arrangements for this

property in St. Thomas, it will return to the full custodianship of the Municipal Corporation, and a new Market will be established there to improve the economic and social life of Yallahs and its surrounding communities.”

He added: “I stated in the public domain in January this year, in specific relation to this same property, that any prospective land arrangement involving a local authority must be submitted to the Ministry for consideration.

The Ministry of Local Government and Community Development’s Land Divestment Committee reviews these matters and makes recommendations to me as the responsible Minister for approval. In some cases, the issues involved may also require the approval of Cabinet. This remains the case. I also want to give the assurance that any use of this land will be properly approved and made public. The Ministry will not allow any deviation from the laws and policies that exist to preserve the financial integrity of the local government system.”



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Gov’t to undertake repair of Musgrave Market



The Ministry of Local Government and Community Development will undertake the repairs to the fire-ravaged Musgrave Market in Port Antonio.

“The repairs, management and operations of the Musgrave Market is the sole prerogative of the Portland Municipal Corporation and the Ministry of Local Government,” said Portfolio Minister, Honourable Desmond McKenzie during a tour of the facility on June 16.

“I want to commend the Member of Parliament (Ann-Marie Vaz of East Portland) for the effort that she has made in going out there and raising funds to assist the vendors. She must be commended for it.”

The Minister used the opportunity to reemphasize that there are no plans to divest the facility, which is operated by the Portland Municipal Corporation.

“I welcome any private individual who wants to come and help with the restoration of the market. But if they are coming, they have to come through the process that exists which is the municipality and the Ministry of Local Government.”

The Musgrave Market was destroyed on May 28 in a blaze that left some 200 registered vendors displaced and affected several nearby businesses. The Ministry has already released \$10 million to begin the clean-up exercise of the market.

“I must say that I am pleased with the effort made by the municipality to under the clean-up exercise. The renovation work will be done on a professional basis and not on a political basis,” Minister McKenzie stressed.

He also mentioned that the renovation will be undertaken following the completion of the designs and procurement processes.

“We are looking at a number of designs and once we have agreed on that there is the procurement part of it. We have to ensure that whatever is done is done in a transparent way.

The process will take some time...the money is in the Ministry to undertake the repairs to the Musgrave Market.”

To date, Members of Parliament Daryl and Ann-Marie Vaz have launched a special fund from which each vendor received a \$100,000 grant.

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Monies allocated for Port Maria Tsunami Early Warning System



KINGSTON, Jamaica: The town of Port Maria, St. Mary will receive a \$17 million Tsunami Early Warning System during the 2023/2024 fiscal year.

“The ODPEM (Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management) will collaborate with the National Works Agency, the Meteorological Service of Jamaica and the Water Resources Authority of Jamaica to implement the System,” announced Honourable Desmond McKenzie, Minister of Local Government and Community Development, during his 2023 Sectoral Presentation in Gordon House last month.

“In addition to the siren that would be triggered when waters exceed a prescribed level, the System will produce data that will ultimately help to produce a Flood Prediction Model.”

Last January, Port Maria was almost submerged after heavy rains pelted the eastern parish and left more than 800 households and businesses of various sizes affected.

“I stated in my last presentation that the town would be next in line for a Tsunami Early Warning System, following its implementation in Old Harbour Bay (St. Catherine). I am pleased to announce that an additional \$17 million has been allocated to the Ministry to provide this System for Port Maria,” Minister McKenzie stated.

The Tsunami Early Warning System will complement the Community Flood Alert Systems Improvement Project - a mechanism developed to inform people in flood-prone areas that flooding is possible or imminent. When a threat occurs, the System gives an alarm so that preventative action can be taken.

During the last financial year, Flood Alert Systems were implemented at Benson Ford in St. Andrew, and Aenon Town and Alley in Clarendon.

The first phase of the project involved the erection of public education and flood warning signs. Community flood gauges showing the movement of water levels and stages of danger were installed at Thatchwalk Bridge in Aenon Town and Alley Bridge. Traffic control gates are also being built at Alley Bridge.

The ODPEM held consultations with the residents of these communities and Community Emergency Response Teams were formed.

The final phase of the project involved the installation of remote flood monitoring and automation systems that were recently completed to coincide with the June 1 start of the 2023 Atlantic Hurricane Season.

“Through the use of sensors that will be attached to the bridges, a Real Time Remote Flood Monitoring System will collect data and transmit text messages and email to all stakeholders, so they can make informed and rapid decisions. This real time alert system will also feature horns and lights, so that people in these vulnerable areas can hear and see that danger is at hand,” added the Minister.

The ODPEM’s capacity to provide relief supplies will be expanded by an extra \$17m. Emergency storage facilities in the ODPEM’s Eastern and Western Regions Work will be rehabilitated with a further \$10m.

“Overall, an additional \$50 million has been allocated to this critical institution, to ensure total readiness for natural and man-made disasters, including the 2023 Atlantic Hurricane Season.”



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The Ministry’s Welfare Committee hosted two raffles for Father’s Day and Mother’s Day during the months of May and June respectively.



Documentation, Information and Access Service’s Anthony Smith accepts his prize from Welfare Chair Dahlia McDonald.



Permanent Secretary Marsha Henry Martin (left) presents Tisha Campbell, Senior Secretary of the Internal Audit Unit, with her prize.



Melisha Johnson of the Finance and Accounts Division shows off her token.