

News on Key Elements
and Achievements of the
ECHO/HelpAge Risk
Reduction Project

Issue 01
December 2014

Disaster Reduction Action

ECHO/HelpAge
Disaster Risk
Reduction project
beneficiary



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ECHO/HelpAge Project Fills Gaps in Local Disaster Risk Reduction Efforts

Jamaica's Vision 2030 Plan highlights a harsh reality concerning disaster risk management in the country. The document intended to take Jamaica to developed world status by 2030, notes that "there are likely to be more frequent and intense storms, high intensity earthquakes and man-made hazards facing the country in the future". Among the concerns is the impact on an already strained economy, when scarce resources are continually filtered to assist in the restoration of disaster stricken areas.

The Government of Jamaica has acknowledged that another major area of concern is that "Jamaica's capacity to deal with disasters is inadequate, and currently hazard risk reduction is not integrated into socio-economic decision making". This view was also highlighted in a 2012 Jamaica: Country Document on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) prepared by the Disaster Risk Reduction Centre at the University of the West Indies. In the Executive Summary of the document, the UWI noted that in its examination of Jamaica's institutional framework for DRR, although

Jamaica's institutional framework is strong, "issues of inadequate human resources, technical expertise and funding were unearthed, and there are several Laws related to or supporting DRR, however enforcement is weak".

Undoubtedly, HelpAge International's (HAI's) implementation of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) funded Disaster Risk Reduction Project is a timely intervention which will go a far way in filling many of the referenced gaps.

The three parishes – Portland, St. Mary and St. Thomas - selected for the implementation of the project are located in Jamaica's easterly belt, a region that is especially prone to intense storms and hurricanes. It is important to note that these are rural precincts where poverty levels are amongst the highest in the country and where vulnerable groups such as Older Persons (OPs) and Persons Living with Disabilities (PWDs) are in high numbers. The UWI's Country Document on Disaster Risk Reduction (2012) points to a UNDP 2009

Report which states that, "In Jamaica the most vulnerable populations also include both men and women living in rural communities, coastal zones and low-lying areas, people with poor housing, the homeless. It is estimated that persons at risk make up 60 % of Jamaica's total population and are generally vulnerable to storm surges, hurricanes and flooding."

The beneficiaries of the ECHO/HAI Disaster Risk Reduction project are therefore among a small minority of Jamaicans, often forgotten, who are not only exposed to practical information to be applied in the event of a disaster, but have also benefitted from direct intervention in improving their physical environment.

The project was successfully undertaken in Port Morant, Golden Grove, Aeolus Valley/Lloyds, Bath, Castleton, Carron Hall, Reach, Long Bay, Fair Prospect and Windsor Castle between May 2013 and December 14, 2014.

"The EU's humanitarian aid funds relief operations for victims of natural disasters and conflicts outside the European Union. Aid is provided impartially, directly to people in need, without discrimination of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation."

The Ire of 2012 Hurricane Reinforces Vulnerabilities of OPs and PWDs in Disasters

The fury of Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 was felt through storm force winds of 80 miles per hour and torrential rain, leaving many Jamaicans displaced and desperate for local support. The brunt of the storm was, however, felt in Portland, St. Mary and St. Thomas, negatively impacting a total of 96,635 persons in the three parishes.

The agriculture sector was most affected, with 20,000 farmers in the parishes incurring damage to cash crops valued at \$776 million. There was also significant damage to the livestock sector (particularly poultry farmers) with 1,760 farmers incurring losses of \$77 million.

The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) reported that just over five thousand houses in Portland, a similar number in St Mary, and close to four thousand five hundred homes in St Thomas suffered minor to severe damage as a result of hurricane Sandy. A combined total of 742 households also lost household items.

It was the view of the local agencies that without assistance many families in the parishes – among them older persons and persons with disabilities - would sink deeper into poverty.

Aftermath spurs creation of ECHO/HelpAge project

The massive destruction and impact of the storm prompted action by the project implementers, HelpAge International who through an expert team of consultants, commissioned a needs assessment which took place December 8 - 14, 2012 in 12 communities across the three parishes.

Through focus group discussions, informal interviews, community hazard mapping and informal consultations with Parish Disaster Coordinators in St Thomas, Portland and St Mary Parish Councils, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management; the beginnings of the ECHO/HAI Disaster Risk Reduction project was formulated.

Communities identify needs

The needs assessment pointed to recognition among the communities that in order to build resilience to hazards, there needed to be improved care for vulnerable groups, improved protection of livelihoods and communities needed to be better organised. It was agreed that capacities had to be built in



Flood rains damage infrastructure and farm lands in eastern Jamaica.

community leadership and knowledge and that training in disaster preparedness, emergency response and livelihood were key activities to reduce the risk from disasters. Significantly, it was felt that older people and persons with disabilities needed greater assistance than other residents during a disaster, with senior citizens groups making up 12%-30% of the communities assessed.

The need for hurricane resistant housing was identified as a priority in most of the communities. Residents also identified structural and non-structural risk reduction activities that were necessary as a means of improving resilience to natural disasters. Livelihood issues also emerged as an important need for communities. Farming is the mainstay of most rural economies and as a result community members felt there was a need to increase resilience of farmers and fishermen to disasters. It was argued that the low level of resilience of farming/fishing communities often result in high impact from hazards. When coupled with the limited compensation by government, farmers suffer greatly, due to the frequency of hazards and low levels of resilience. This view is reflected in 2006 and 2010 ODPEM Reports, which show that in the past 10 years Portland and St Thomas ranked 4th and 5th for flood frequency and 2nd and 3rd for frequent landslides. In 1998, damage from Portland floods was estimated at approximately \$340million, 50% of which was attributable to the agricultural sector, while in 2006 flood damage in St Mary resulted in \$49 million worth of damage.

A Stakeholder project design workshop was held on January 22, 2012 in Portland to further validate the needs assessment and to capture other pertinent issues that needed to be taken into consideration to finalize the core elements of the project. A total of 49 stakeholders were present comprising representatives from the target communities, and representatives from government and non-government organizations to include Jamaica Agricultural Society, Jamaica Fire Brigade, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, National Council for Senior Citizens, ODPEM, Portland and St Thomas Parish Council, Portland Environmental Protection Association, Rural Agricultural Development Authority, Social Development Commission, and Women's Resource Outreach Centre.

Candid Discussions Drive Mid Term Project Review Meeting

Project beneficiaries added their voices to a robust discussion concerning the review and status of the ECHO/HAI Disaster Risk Reduction Project. The meeting which was held on Tuesday, January 14, 2014 at Pollyanna Caterers and Banqueters at Stanton Terrace in Kingston saw close to one hundred persons from St. Thomas, Portland and St. Mary, as well as HAI and ECHO staff members in attendance.

The objective of hosting the meeting was to review the progress, implementation, challenges, lessons learnt and viable solutions for the timely and successful completion of the project. The group in a candid exchange pointed to the need to analyse elements of the project from a gender perspective, which required documenting project activities based on respective gender needs. The community members also felt it important to coordinate project activities in consultation with the target population, particularly within the context of identifying and agreeing on times convenient to the intended target group.

The groups were also of the view that HAI staff should become creative in how they disseminated information to the target population, primarily farmers, to ensure messages are easily understood and engaging. It was further recommended that the agency re-evaluate how it branded itself, and specifically the medium through which it seeks to reach targeted beneficiaries. Many felt workshops which are the primary communication channels for HAI/ECHO were too formal and above their level of understanding. Participants were of the view that workshops engendered intimidation among target population. The group highly recommended that the project implementers meet beneficiaries in their comfort zones such as bars, corner shops, and during community meetings.

The discussions also highlighted a need to increase HAI presence in the targeted communities as many seemed unaware of the organization. It was agreed that increased visits and more direct interface in communities was time consuming and expensive, however, it was felt that the results would be worthwhile. The members also felt there should be greater effort to prepare outreach workers who have responsibility for mobilizing participants to ensure that specific information on the project could be shared with potential beneficiaries.

Shared challenges highlighted among community groups

Participating communities highlighted their experiences within the context of mobilization and logistics, challenges and recommendations presented by the groups. Mobilization appeared to have worked well in Reach, Portland primarily as a result of HAI engaging the help of established community groups and key community personnel to mobilize persons.

Mobilization was a challenge in St. Thomas, and it was felt that the lack of knowledge about Help Age International resulted in the poor attendance of meetings in the parish, as too the channels used to communicate the upcoming meetings. Meanwhile, communities in St. Mary had mixed reviews with Castleton emphasizing that it was a difficult process as a result of the organizers' inexperience in community mobilization. Overall, the challenges among the participating communities in each parish were similar and included insufficient time allocated to mobilization ahead of meetings; identifying appropriate meeting venues; expense of transportation for participants; and constraints faced by Persons Living with Disabilities (PWD) in arriving at meeting venues. Some participants also indicated dissatisfaction with catering services provided during the meetings, and expressed concerns about the length of the presentations and inadequate practical information shared with participants.

Communities bat to solve challenges faced

The groups put forward a number of recommendations to the project organizers to include providing reimbursement for travelling costs or a stipend; developing a more convenient work schedule, preferably weekend sessions; assessing the academic and literacy levels of target population in an effort to develop appropriate teaching-learning presentations techniques to suit the groups. Participants in the mid-term evaluation meeting also emphasized the need to incentivize participation among the target population by issuing Certificates of Participation. It was also felt that efforts should be made to boost the morale of target population, such as farmers who felt that their work was not viewed as an occupation. Project organizers were thus encouraged to highlight the positive aspects of farming, in particular the significant contribution to economic development in the country.

HelpAge Caribbean Representative acknowledges concerns and commits continued support within parameters of project

HelpAge International Caribbean Representative, Jeff James in responding to participants noted that the overall feedback was positive and committed to continuing to develop strategies that will work for the project. He cautioned, however, against the high expectation of hand outs among some community members in relation to the project. Mr. James acknowledged that the timing for the roll out of the project may have influenced the view held by some persons that the project was a "hand-out", bearing in mind the first workshop was held during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. He said the cultural phenomenon in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean is that in difficult periods such as disasters, hand-outs are usually forthcoming from politicians. He emphasized that this expectation will change over time as people become aware of the role and function of HelpAge International.

In addressing the logistical challenges associated with the project, the Caribbean Representative implored participants to manage the issues in an effort to ensure an efficient and effective implementation process. Mr. James welcomed the recommendation for increased presence of HAI staff in target communities, in particular in interfacing with communities and hosting planning meetings outside of training workshops. He also acknowledged the need for continuing promotion of the HAI initiative.

In his closing remarks, Mr. James introduced the question of how to tackle critical needs of persons encountered during project implementation. He noted that the needs of persons could not be ignored; however, HAI had to remain focused on the objectives of the project and what the organization is able to facilitate. Mr. James strongly advocated for a referral system to various arms of the state to address critical needs identified among target population such as the Programme for Advancement through Health and Education (PATH), Jamaica Drugs for the Elderly Programme (JADEP), the National Health Fund (NHF) and Parish Councils among others.

Retrofitting Exercise Brings Renewal To Communities

Scores of residents in eleven (11) communities in St. Thomas, Portland, and St. Mary benefitted from retrofitting and micro-mitigation activities valued at over \$J8 million. The activities which formed part of the HAI-ECHO Disaster Risk Reduction project was undertaken in Port Morant, Golden Grove, Aeolus Valley/Lloyds, and Bath in St. Thomas; Castleton and Carron Hall in St. Mary; and Long Road, Reach, Long Bay, Fair Prospect and Windsor Castle in Portland.



Young hands and hearts join retrofitting effort.

Volunteerism champions retrofitting exercise

Ninety one (91) houses were retrofitted in the communities, most of them over a two (2) month period, while two homes deemed to have been in a bad state of disrepair were rebuilt.

Close to seventy (70) volunteers from across the communities assisted with the retrofitting activities, while the HelpAge International team utilized its technical and skilled personnel to spearhead the activities.

The combined efforts of the group resulted in the completion of works within a very stringent timeline for the participating communities. Port Morant's retrofitting activities began on September 2 and ended September 5, 2014; while the community of Golden Grove began its retrofitting activities on September 9 and ended on September 12, 2014. Bath, in St. Thomas began retrofitting homes on September 16 through to September 22, 2014. In St. Mary, a similar time frame of three to four days was maintained, with Castleton retrofitting activities taking place between September 23 and 26, while Carron Hall undertook retrofitting activities September 25 through to September 29.

The retrofitting schedule in Portland varied, with up to seven days allotted for completion of works. For example, Reach retrofitting activities began October 1 and ended October 8, 2014, while Long Bay undertook works between October 6 and 8. Retrofitting activities began in Fair Prospect on October 13 and ended October 16 and Windsor Castle rounded out its efforts over five days between October 21 and 26. Six houses were retrofitted in Long Road, Portland earlier in 2014.



Rotting boards in St. Thomas dwelling.



Retrofitting underway in earnest.



Roof under repairs.

Micro-Mitigation Initiative Addresses Well-Being Of Communities

Community members were given a voice in identifying a need or essential activity that would benefit their districts under the Micro-Mitigation initiative. The projects varied among the ten participating communities, with each selection aimed at reducing the potential impact of disasters or improvement of the livelihood of targeted areas.

A firefighting system was installed at the Aeolus Valley All Age School in keeping with the School Disaster Plan to include water tanks, pumps and hoses. The project began on November 25 and ended in early December.

Residents of Bath in St. Thomas chose to construct a "V-Drain" at the Community Center to alleviate flooding in the area. The project was also undertaken between November 25 and early December.

Garbage Skips were constructed and placed in various locations in Port Morant, St. Thomas between late November and early December 2014, while the neighbouring community of Golden Grove elected to install fire extinguishers, and smoke alarms at the Dalvey and Duckenfield Primary Schools in early December in keeping with the Schools Disaster Plans.

Meanwhile, in Portland, community members of Long Bay opted to install six (6) water tanks in various locations for water harvesting. Long Bay's micro – mitigation project started on October 18 and ended November 24, 2014. Similarly, Windsor Castle residents installed two (2) water tanks for water harvesting at the Windsor Castle All Age



Water tank installed in Long Bay, Portland as a Rain Water Harvesting Micro-Mitigation initiative.

School starting November 17. In Fair Prospect community members installed four (4) fire extinguishers for the Fair Prospect Primary School in keeping with the school's disaster plan, while residents of Reach refurbished the Reach Community Center between November 19 and early December.

Garbage Skips were put in at various locations in Castleton, St. Mary between December 4 and 5, 2014.

The Gift of Caring:

Community Caregivers benefit from training programme to aid older persons and persons with disabilities in emergencies

Just over one hundred and twenty (120) community caregivers in three parishes are now proficient in the delivery of care of older persons and persons with disabilities during emergencies. The first leg of the programme dubbed, Care of Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities in Emergencies", began on November 26, 2013 in Portland, with sessions held on December 3, 10 and 17. A second phase of the project rolled out in St. Thomas January 27 to 29, 2014 and February 7. St. Mary communities benefited under the project on February 3, 10, 17 and 18, 2014.

The goal of the training programme is to equip community members with the requisite knowledge and skills necessary to respond to and care for older persons and persons living with disabilities.

In support of Jamaica's Vision 2030 Plan, the project conceptualizers explain that the programme is intended to realize a voice for older persons and persons with disabilities as their needs, "must be understood... and they be given the opportunity to be full participants in any plans designed to enhance their existence during emergencies". The training programme was therefore, intended to enhance the learning process for participants to gain insight into the challenges faced by older persons and persons with disabilities; while providing the tools for empowering trainees and community recipients in a reciprocal development process.

Arguably, the programme is the ultimate gift of caring that is expected to have a lasting impact among these two vulnerable groups in Jamaica during emergencies. As noted by the World Health Organisation (WHO), "persons with disabilities face various challenges to the enjoyment of their right to health. For example, persons with physical disabilities often have difficulties accessing health care, especially in rural areas, slums and suburban settings; persons with psychosocial disabilities may not have access to affordable treatment through the public health system". ECHO/HAI in its introduction of the Caregivers programme has sought to ensure that Peer Support Groups in the participating communities are the first line of support for these vulnerable groups during an emergency. Acknowledging that Preparation and Response systems are needed for older persons and persons with disabilities, the programme strengthened the competencies of the trainees in emergency awareness, decision making and appropriate networking.

Practical sessions and lifelong lessons learnt

At the end of the programme participants were able to demonstrate basic appreciation of the physical, social and cognitive challenges of older persons and persons with disabilities; and are now better equipped with knowledge to assist both vulnerable groups.

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In Pictures: ECHO/HelpAge Disaster Reduction Project



Staff member of Curtis Bottom Basic School, Port Morant, St. Thomas proudly accepts institution's Safety Plan under ECHO/HelpAge Disaster Risk Reduction Project from HAI staff member



Volunteer assists in the retrofitting exercise in St. Thomas.



Children of Market Road Basic in St. Thomas share in the handing over of the school's Safety Plan.



Resident of Windsor Castle in Portland volunteers on retrofitting exercise.



Participants engage in practical demonstrations of checking older persons vitals including blood pressure checks.

In Pictures: ECHO/HelpAge Disaster Reduction Project



Handing over of supplies under Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) in Bath, St. Thomas.



Volunteer in St. Thomas discusses scope of project with ECHO/HelpAge staff.



Fair Prospect Primary School, Portland receives fire extinguishers for the school under the Micro-Mitigation initiative.



Trainees receive stockpile items and supplies for Community Emergency Response Team in Golden Grove, St. Thomas.

Why focus on Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities in Emergencies?

"They are affected in the same way others are. The special needs of this community are often isolated from services, and this needs to be addressed during a disaster/emergency. They, like others, often lose their family members, neighbours, homes and belongings and at times are faced with traumatic situations without the relevant support"

- Gloria Goffe,
President,
Combined Disabilities Association

The Gift of Caring: Community Caregivers benefit from training programme to aid older persons and persons with disabilities in emergencies

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HelpAge staff engages participants in Caregivers workshop.

The participants also developed an understanding of some of the basic resources that are available to assist them in meeting the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities

The groups were introduced to practical and stimulating activities to reinforce the concepts presented such as Managing the Physical Changes during Emergencies and Keeping Fit and Active for OP/PWD; Caring for the Bedridden; and learning how to carry out vital checks to include temperature, pulse, respiration and the reading of blood pressure. They were also exposed to the importance of Assessing Care Needs; Physical Changes and Chronic Diseases; Nutrition of older persons and persons with disability; Alzheimer's disease and caregiver stress and Meeting the Communication Challenges of older persons and persons with disabilities.

An evaluation tool – Caring for Older Persons and Persons Living with Disability Ageing Quiz - was developed to assess participants before and after training. A pre-test was issued prior to the training sessions to gauge participants' knowledge ahead of presentations and practical

exercises. At the end of the training, participants were given a post test to measure how much they learnt from the training session.

A diverse group of community leaders participated in the Caring for Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities in Emergencies programme.

The over 100 participants saw mixed age groups represented including persons aged 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; and 50-59. Many were self-employed individuals such as farmers, shop keepers, and shoe makers. Other occupations included dental assistant, house keepers, students, fire-fighter, teacher, and hotel workers. An estimated sixty-five (65) percent of participants had attained at least secondary school education; while eleven (11) percent benefited from Vocational education and seven (7) percent received University level education.

Resourcefulness to Resilience: Getting to know Ms. Murfie Hermine Thompson

She dedicated much of her professional life to the health sector, but, for Murfie, "Hermine" Thompson it was her love for and skill as a hairdresser that defined her resourcefulness and made her a respected member of the community. Reflecting on her active life, Ms. Hermine, revealed that she would come home from work to see a full house of persons waiting to get their hair done. This would have been a pattern for most of her working life.

The last four years significantly changed that pace when she suffered a stroke which has resulted in Ms. Hermine spending much of her time in bed. The mother of two sons, both of whom reside overseas and six grandchildren has little family support except that of her common-law spouse.

The 75 year old resident of Pen, St. Thomas is a mere shadow of herself, weighing less than one hundred (100) pounds and unable to consume anything but soft foods such as porridge and soup.

Unsettling circumstances leads to welcomed help

Despite her years of service at the St. Thomas Health Centre, Ms. Hermine is not receiving a pension. This is as a result of the unfortunate registration of her alias on claim documents. She instead relies heavily on PATH benefits which are never sufficient to adequately cover her needs including medical expenses. She therefore depends on her children and others for assistance with diapers and incontinence pads, bedding needs and food.

The plight of the senior citizen who is remembered as a giving community member did not go unnoticed and she was selected to benefit under the ECHO/HAI Disaster Risk Reduction project's retrofitting exercise programme. An assessment of her home determined that the structure had recently been renovated, however, the roof needed to be reinforced with hurricane straps. It was also found that the paneling of the two-room

dwelling were rotten and in need of repair. The house also needed bracing to make it more hurricane resistant.

While circumstances have shifted her ability to contribute to her own livelihood and to serve the community, Ms. Hermine continues to embrace life in her own way. That she is able to do this from a home that will be able to withstand hurricane force winds, and offer protection in disasters, is settling for the senior citizen.

It is easy to appreciate how a lady who has been as resourceful as Ms. Hermine can today demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity. Arguably, her eventful life prepared her for this leg of the journey.



Life of trials, but moments of triumphs: a glimpse into the life of Imogene McPherson

After nearly nine decades on earth, Imogene McPherson has seen her fair share of trials, but the triumphs are never too far from sight. It is significant that in the midst of recent struggles with her health and general living conditions she is able to celebrate a triumph as a beneficiary under the ECHO/HAI retrofitting exercise programme.

Ms. Imogene worked for a number of years alongside her husband who was a subsistence farmer who sold his produce in the Coronation market in downtown Kingston. She also worked as a domestic helper for over ten years, but had to discontinue both income generating activities in the early 1980s as a result of cataracts in both eyes. She was unable to see, particularly in the daytime and became reliant on her grand-daughter to move around.

In 1989, she was blessed to be chosen as a recipient of an eye surgery on the Mercy Ship which docked in Port Antonio, Portland. The team of doctors was only able to operate on her left eye, but it is a procedure that has to date provided much relief to the now 85 year old.

Her struggles have grown in recent years, with her having sole responsibility for her mentally ill son who is over 50 years old. The frequency and destructiveness of his mental breakdowns results in continuous damage to her home and its contents. Ms. Imogene has had to make the painful decision of placing her son in a small section to the back of the house. Still the damage over time has taken a toll on the structure. She gets minimal support from her other children and relies on paltry benefits from PATH and National Insurance Scheme (NIS). Even with both benefits, Ms. Imogene is unable to effectively cover her utility bills, and as a result her water was disconnected. The ECHO/HAI retrofitting exercise was a timely intervention for this mother and grandmother. According to Ms. Imogene, "I feel quite alright and thank Red Cross for the help because I didn't have any money to do that".

Communities, Stakeholders Embrace Technology To Help Fight Disasters

The infusion of technology in the ECHO/HAI Disaster Risk Reduction project could arguably be considered one of the more successful elements of the programme.

One hundred and sixty four (164) participants - 78 males and 86 females - completed training in Emergency Telecommunications and Amateur Radio Technology Course, while each community received emergency communication equipment, including mobile repeaters, and base station radio equipment (Mobile VHF/UHF) with back-up power supplies. Similar equipment was provided to the stakeholder agencies to facilitate communications with the target communities in times of emergency.

The trainees included staff from the Portland and St. Thomas Parish Councils as well as HelpAge International, the Jamaica Fire Brigade, the Jamaica Constabulary Force, Parish Disaster Coordinators, as well as members drawn from targeted communities.

As a critical component of the emergency telecommunications system, base stations have also been set up in communities and at the agency level. Permission has been granted through the Spectrum Management Authority via ODPEM to facilitate the assignment of radio frequencies for the use of the VHF/UHF two way radios.



Participants from the Advanced Radio Telecommunications training prepare for an earthquake simulation exercise at Caymanas Estate.

Training objective and components

The Emergency Radio Telecommunications training has facilitated the establishment of an emergency communication network to link the vulnerable communities via local two-way radio systems to the Parish Disaster Committee and ODPEM.

The training is integral to aiding communities to communicate and transmit critical information during the onset of an emergency. The main topics covered were:

- Introduction to Emergency Telecommunications;
- Introduction to the National Emergency Affiliated Radio Service (E.A.R.S.); Practical Use of VHF/UHF Two-Way Radio Equipment;
- Operating Procedures;
- Basic Message Handling.

Success channels sustainability

Over thirty percent of participants from the training indicated an interest in undertaking level II training in Emergency Telecommunications and Amateur Radio Technology License Course which took place in early 2014. Meanwhile, one of the participants from the training has been employed by the Emergency Affiliated Radio Services in the area of radio telecommunications.

Advanced training took place over a 17 week period with twenty three trainees and culminated with a graduation exercise in August. The areas covered during the level two training included the history of Jamaica Amateur Radio Association (JARA); Preparation for Amateur Radio License; Introduction to Emergency Communications; The Networks for Messages; Message Handling; What Happens When Called; Preparing for Deployment; Emergency Activation; Set Up, Initial Operations and Shutdown; Safety & Survival; Alternative Communication Methods and What to Expect in Large Disasters

The training was the second of its kind being undertaken by HelpAge (the activity was included in the recently concluded DIPECHO VIII project), and ODPEM utilized the training as a part of its pilot in rolling out its national training in Emergency Telecommunications. ODPEM has subsequently signed a MOU with ABACUS, a local NGO to facilitate the development of Emergency Affiliated Radio Service (E.A.R.S.) Network in Jamaica. As a result, participants of the Emergency Radio Telecommunications training were selected from each parish to support the national EARS Network.

ODPEM facilitated the engagement of HelpAge with PANOS to observe an early warning system (EWS) that was developed for



Participants proudly show off their completion certificates at graduation exercise for Advanced Radio Telecommunications training in August 2014.

persons with disabilities and implemented in two communities previously covered by the DIPECHO VIII project.

ODPEM has since recommended the introduction of a Mass Notification System for vulnerable persons, their guardian(s) and first responders. The system will provide personal alerts and messaging which allows disaster emergency agencies to create and send targeted information to vulnerable populations. Some of the information in the system include: severe weather warnings, evacuation instructions, emergency instructions, a community alert system (sirens,

strobe lights etc.) and mobile phones. The system is quick to transfer messages to large communities with a single FM-based message sent in seconds. The information is transmitted using an existing FM-based radio station. Messages may also be received by multiple devices - email, mobile phone, wall and portable receivers. VHF -two way radio operators will hereafter be able to support the process by ongoing communication with key stakeholders, vulnerable groups and communities.

Weathering the storms of life: Norman Smith shows gratitude for relief



HelpAge staff speaks with project beneficiary, Norman Smith

"I get pure promise. Yuh tink a little people come here and write up form? Money come here two times and me nuh get nutten. After three months and some days me spend a people house because everything was destroyed, so till me get some help to set up just one room".

The devastation left behind by Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 is a horror Norman Smith knows only too well.

The former sugar factory worker lived in a three bedroom home, with a kitchen and bathroom prior to Hurricane Sandy. He had a tenant he was forced to give notice so he could relocate to a safer part of the house. Mr. Smith recalls that most of the furniture was damaged and he could barely salvage any personal possessions based on the extent of the damaged caused by heavy rain and wind. The 76 year old had been actively farming bananas and plantains up to the time of the

hurricane. Following the passage of the storm, his livelihood was destroyed.

He currently receives pension which he admits is not nearly enough to address his needs. For Mr. Smith who has worked for over 32 years, 15 of which was dedicated to serving the Duckenfield Sugar Factory; five years at the Princess Margaret Hospital and six years each at Flowers Farm and Eastern Banana in the parish, his being able to live comfortably and in a safe environment is priority. It is not surprising then that as a recipient of the ECHO/HAI retrofitting programme, he is showing gratitude for the relief provided, "I feel good for getting the assistance. Mi give thanks fi dat very much".

Selfless And Determined: Florine Lee Welcomes Assistance To Provide Better Life For Her Children

At 37 years old, Florine Lee of Dillon, Long Road, in Portland is a single mother of five with very limited support.

Florine completed All Age School, but as a result of getting pregnant she was unable to begin her secondary school education. To date, she has not been able to realize that dream as all her children reside at home and are largely dependent on her as breadwinner. There is no support from the children's fathers, but this may be one of the reasons this selfless mother is even more determined to find ways to improve life for herself and her children.

She gets some support from her elderly parents and has been hoping to set up a chicken-rearing business to sell meat in her community. That plan has not yet materialized and the absence of an income has weighed heavily on her family, "Is two weeks now my children don't get to go to school because I don't have the money to send them. The Principal call me because the children absent. Sometimes I can only afford to send them to school one day a week".

In addition to her inability to ensure her children benefit from a formal education, she has been faced with the challenge of inadequate shelter, a problem that has now been addressed having received assistance under the ECHO/HAI retrofitting programme.

"I feel real good, thankful (for the assistance). Two nights ago my son called me, 'mommy, mommy!' The rain was falling and he got wet in bed although my son had placed some temporary covering on the roof to prevent the leaking".

Not only is she grateful that her house is now adequately protected from hurricane force rain and wind, Florine has already crafted a new entrepreneurial venture which will involve utilizing materials taken from her house during the exercise to build a shop at the front of her home. Her approach is a reminder that selflessness and determination are two primary ingredients in the mix of life that will serve us up rewards when we least expect it!

Grandmother bounces back in the face of adversity: Meet Gloria Champagnie

Gloria Champagnie is no stranger to a life of adversity. She recalls that she has had responsibility very early in her life, a reality which would have likely prepared her for the current role as caregiver for her five grandchildren. Ms. Gloria explains that the children are on PATH and this does help, particularly with their commute from home to school,

"One of them goes to Titchfield High and gets a drive on the bus, two of the other children go to Happy Grove and I walk with them half way to Happy Grove. The five and twelve year old go to school at Golden Grove Infant and St. Thomas Technical".

She admits that sometimes the children do not go to school because there is no money to support them going. Ms. Gloria's loss of income as a domestic worker has not helped the situation, but it was a decision made to ensure she would be present at home to see to their overall well-being.

The 57 year old has been especially aggrieved by the state of her home following the passage of Hurricane Sandy. The three bedroom house was extensively damaged, including the roof which she was forced to cover with tarpaulin. The remaining sheets of zinc on the structure, though badly dented were looted during the time she had to evacuate her home.

Under the retrofitting exercise, Ms. Gloria is singing praises to the project implementers as the assistance has addressed a major challenge in their daily lives,

"You see when Mr. Brown come and tell me, mi feel happy. Mi grateful fi what they do for me...me give thanks!"

'A Not So Obvious Group' Takes Centre Stage On International Day Of Disaster Reduction

The 2013 observance of the United Nations International Day of Natural Disaster Reduction turned the spotlight on persons with disabilities, a focus which appropriately captured part of the target population under the ECHO/HAI Disaster Risk Reduction project.

Dubbed, "A Not So Obvious Conversation: Living with Disabilities and Disasters", the day was strategically used to launch the ECHO/HAI Disaster Risk Reduction project on Friday October 18, 2013 at a joint European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DIPECHO) partners and stakeholders function in Morant Bay, St. Thomas.

Close to two hundred persons participated and benefitted from appropriate interventions involving residents of the ten participating communities in raising awareness on disaster risk reduction and in particular, the levels of vulnerabilities experienced by persons with disabilities and older persons in emergencies.

Key participants in the day's celebration were Jocelyn Lance, Head of Office for ECHO in the Caribbean; Jesus Orus Baguena, Minister Counsellor and Head of Operations for the Delegation of the European Union in Jamaica; Jeffrey James, Regional Director of HelpAge International, who officially launched the ECHO funded project; Errol Alliman, Project Coordinator for the ECHO Sandy Project at Jamaica Red Cross; Hurley Taylor, Advisor to the Minister of Health; Horace Glaze,

Deputy Director General (Actg.), Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management; and Adrienne Pinnock, Public Relations Officer, Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities.

Residents from the target communities of the project, members of the Morant Bay Senior Citizens' Club and community representatives from the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities also attended the event. The day's activities included remarks and presentations from the various stakeholders, first aid demonstrations from the Jamaica Red Cross and Jamaica Fire Brigade and cultural performances from the students of the Randolph Lopez School of Special Education.

Participants of the Emergency Telecommunications training across the ten communities made a brief input by demonstrating the use of two way radios in emergencies. In addition, ODPEM made a presentation on the mass notice early warning system which has been piloted under the PANOS project for persons with disabilities. An exhibition was mounted by HelpAge International, Jamaica Red Cross and ODPEM.

The International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction is a United Nations' designated day which is observed annually on October 13. The main aim of the day is to raise awareness of disaster risk reduction. It also encourages people and governments to participate in building more resilient communities and nations.



Wheelchair donation eases challenges to access health services: Miss Cherry, from Castleton, St. Mary graciously accepts the wheelchair which was provided for her to access health services in the community. Ms. Cherry suffered a stroke and has limited mobility. Her family has had to arrange help from community members to lift her out of her house located on the hillside to the main road in order to make her regular doctor's visits.