



## JAMAICA SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUND

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#### **No longer have dispossessed-Indigenous communities built a bridge to future prosperity**

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The United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* which was adopted during its 61st session in New York City on 13 September 2007, sets out the individual and collective rights of such groups, as well as their rights to culture, identity, language, employment, health, education and other needs centring on development.

Within Jamaica, indigenous communities are continuing to benefit from a range of government interventions which are aimed at improving community safety and also enhancing the ability of residents to share their culture and earn in a sustainable way.

Included in this initiative is development work done through the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) in several maroon communities and the Rastafari Community in Montego Bay. Millions have also been invested in such communities for the upgrade of roads, water and health facilities, upgrading of tourism infrastructure, as well as investment in disaster risk management. Indigenous communities frequently had their beginnings in Jamaica as socially and economically dispossessed and disenfranchised Afro-Jamaican groups. The Maroons however are a remnant of the plantation economy, comprising Africans and men and women of African descent who escaped from forced labour to establish free communities in the mountainous interior of the island where they practiced and preserved their culture and way of life. .

The United Nations Declaration of 2007 emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.”

It additionally prohibits discrimination against them, requesting their “full and effective participation in all matters that concern them and their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own visions of economic and social development.”

In modern Jamaica, many of these communities have expressed the desire to retain their governance and cultural traditions, but remain in need of development assistance.

The government of Jamaica through JSIF has been able to provide significant aid for projects which have improved quality of life for indigenous residents.

One example of this is the Moore Town health center, upgraded at a cost of \$5.9 million under the Emergency Recovery Project and funded by the World Bank. This completed project has provided better health care for residents of the Upper Rio Grande Valley of Portland.

Another component of this project was training in disaster management and recovery, aimed at increasing the capacity of citizens to plan for, and recover from the effects of disasters.

In St. Mary, OPEC, through JSIF funded and implemented the upgrading of the Scotts Hall water supply at total cost of \$10.1 million. Over in Accompong, St. Elizabeth, where the poor condition of roads was a public safety risk and also inhibited economic activity, JSIF with World Bank funding, implemented the upgrading and rehabilitation of 3.00 km of roadway leading into the community, starting from River Hole to Hill Top via Myrtle Shop and from the River Hole towards Cedar Spring. Total cost was \$19.6 million.

Residents of Accompong have enjoyed improved access to economic opportunities, social services and facilities as a result of the improved road in the community.

The JSIF through the Rural and Economic Development Initiative (REDI) which is funded by the World Bank has also pursued tourism projects for selected groups.

REDI aims to assist rural community groups to access grant financing for business operations, infrastructure and organizational capacity. It seeks to assist rural micro and small agricultural and tourism enterprises to become market-ready or export-ready.

Under this project, the Charles Town Maroon Council which offers a unique cultural heritage tourism product tracing the history and showcasing the culture of the Maroons in Jamaica has been able to improve its product.

The Charles Town Maroons offer a Maroon Museum tour, performances of 'preparatory rites' at the Asafu Yard as well as the Koromantee and the Afana Machete dances, and traditional food is served to visitors. In 2012, the JSIF under REDI provided J\$17.86 million in grant funding to the Council to enhance and improve the marketability of the cultural experience.

In the community of Montego Bay, In St. James in, another indigenous community was able to implement its vision of cultural exchange and sustainable economic development under JSIF's Rastafari Indigenous Village Infrastructure Upgrading and Marketing project.

The project, which was handed over in March 2014, included construction of three cabins, a museum, yoga centre, Solomon Mall and restroom facilities; rehabilitation of existing kitchen and restrooms, and the upgrading of the entertainment area, other infrastructure works and marketing development.

The village epitomizes the idea of a group of people working collectively to build productivity out of their own creativity and resulting in job creation for the community. As these and other indigenous communities within Jamaica continue to work towards self-actualization, the government through JSIF will do its part in responding to the demand for an authentic and sustainable existence.

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