



# MINISTER MCKENZIE HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Photo: Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie.

Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, has underscored the pivotal role of local government in Jamaica and emphasised the urgent need to counter prevailing negative perceptions surrounding local governance.

Addressing the monthly meeting of the St. James Municipal Corporation on April 11, Minister McKenzie cited the low voter turnout in the recent local government elections as a barometer of public sentiment towards local governance.

He noted that while some criticisms may be warranted, others stem from misconceptions or skepticism about the efficacy of local government.

The Minister said that Jamaica is one of the few nations in the region with a local government system, which, he pointed out, is critical to the day-to-day lives of citizens.

“I challenge anybody ... to show me one aspect of life in Jamaica that local government is not involved in – our roads, our markets, buildings, our fire services, poor relief,” he said.

“It is important that we speak volumes about our achievements in local government, about the things...that we have been able to accomplish,” Mr. McKenzie emphasised.

He urged councillors to reflect on their responsibilities and to work towards upholding the local government framework.

“The question must be asked of us as councillors...are we doing what we are supposed to do? We have to demonstrate a certain level of responsibility in executing our duties to the people, not just here in St. James, but right across the country,” he pointed out.

Turning to the work underway to develop the Charles Gordon Market in the parish, Minister McKenzie urged the St. James Municipal Corporation to engage with the various stakeholders to ensure that the facility is utilised as intended.

“The work has started already and when the expansion is completed, it can't be that [the Government] spends ... in excess of \$100 million to renovate the Charles Gordon Market and at the end of the day the market is empty, and you can't get access to the road because the vendors find it more convenient to sell on the road,” the Minister pointed out.

“So, I am urging councillors to engage the people in your divisions who are vendors and even urge the shoppers not to engage with those who are selling in areas that are not designated for vending,” he said.

JIS MONTEGO BAY

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Photo: Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, presents a scholarship to Tatayana Graham, a first-year medical student at the University of the West Indies, Mona, during the 2024 Board of Supervision's scholarship awards ceremony held recently at Boone Hall Oasis.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT MINISTER HAILS 2024 CLASS OF SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES FOR BEING OUTSTANDING EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

Minister of Local Government and Community Development Hon. Desmond McKenzie has hailed the Board of Supervision's 2024 batch of Scholarship Awardees, for their hard work, tenacity, and determination to overcome adversity.

In greeting this year's Awardees at a special ceremony held in their honour recently under the theme "Celebrating Triumph Over Adversity", Minister McKenzie noted that through this Scholarship Programme, the Board of Supervision and the Poor Relief Departments in the Local Authorities, the life chances of children of less fortunate families across the country have significantly improved. "You are not just successful students, working in your classes and exams, but also ambassadors for success. You are highly motivational and influential examples, who are showing everyone in your communities and beyond, that hard work and discipline bring success...that their dreams are possible because of what you have done and are still achieving."

At this year's ceremony, 61 students at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels were given awards valued at a total of J\$3,070 million, based on:

PEP passes with an average of

**85%** and above.

CSEC passes 5 or more subjects including English Language and at least one numerical subject.

CAPE passes at least 3 subjects with grades 1 to 4. At the Tertiary Level – A minimum Grade Point Average of 3.0

Secretary to the Board of Supervision, Ms. Treka Lewis, noted that the Annual Scholarship Awards Programme represents a formal acknowledgment of the trials and triumphs of the children who are enrolled in the Poor Relief Programme. "This form of recognition is a crucial component within our overarching mission to elevate the Poor Relief Programme into a distinguished entity within the realm of Human Services.

We are deeply committed to reshaping perceptions surrounding Poor Relief, thus embarking on various initiatives aimed at amplifying awareness about the invaluable contributions made by the Poor Relief Department and the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development towards enhancing the lives of our most vulnerable citizens. The Poor Relief Departments have nurtured and encouraged the potential of the children of less fortunate families, and they have witnessed several success stories, from doctors, lawyers, teachers and astute businessmen and women."





Photo: Youth participants engage in the launch of the 8th annual Youth Summer Employment Programme (YSEP), kicking off another year of opportunities for skill development and community involvement.

## HISTORIC 10,000 YOUNG PEOPLE TO GET **JOBS**

The 8th annual Youth Summer Employment Programme (YSEP) is fully underway across Jamaica, and is comprised of the largest number of participants since it was launched in 2017. In his address at this year's official opening ceremony in June, Local Government and Community Development Minister, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, emphasised that the Youth Summer Employment Programme has been a beacon of hope for Jamaica's young people. "Since 2017, over 40,000 young people have been professionally trained and deployed to help the Ministry and the Local Authorities implement critical functions, while earning a good income. This is an immensely popular Programme, the largest in the Caribbean, and we are always being flooded with requests from the youngsters about the details for each year."

The YSEP is also being implemented in tandem with the Ministry's Youth Summer Camps, which are managed by the Social Development Commission in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Youth.

These Camps are designed to instil positive values in young people and divert them away from lifestyles that will derail or destroy their future. The Camps have been making a valuable contribution to supporting regular school attendance and reducing anti-social behaviour among significant numbers of our young people. This year, 60 Youth Summer Camps will be established across Jamaica to give youngsters the best interactions, teaching, leadership and mentorship, to ensure that they have the best chances in life.

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Photo: Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, making his contribution to the 2024/25 Sectoral Debate in the House of Representatives on May 28.

## **GROUNDBREAKING NEW EQUIPMENT TO ALLOW FIREFIGHTERS TO SAVE MORE LIVES AND PROPERTY**

Minister of Local Government and Community Development Hon. Desmond McKenzie has announced a new electronic Records Management System for the Jamaica Fire Brigade, which will allow for increased response times and precise access to buildings affected by fire or threatened by fire.

“This sounds like a book-keeping system and it does include inventory management, but in fact, what it will do is streamline the JFB’s entire building inspection process for properties, including inspection schedules, reports of

violations, and compliance tracking. It will store building plans islandwide into an electronic database, thereby giving firefighters quick access to floor plans and fire escape routes. It will provide live tracking of fire personnel and equipment to ensure maximum safety and efficiency. “Even more than that, it will create and manage our firefighters’ shift schedules, including overtime and leave requests, so that they are not over-worked, stressed-out or burnt-out. The System will also manage emergency calls, log them, specify the nature and priority of incidents, and dispatch the appropriate personnel and equipment. Five modules of this new Records Management System are now being tested.

“This is a total game-changer in the life of the Brigade, as this Government continues the work of creating a first-world fire service in Jamaica.”

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Photo: A bush fire blazes through dry vegetation, highlighting the urgent need for fire safety and environmental awareness in affected areas.

## **LOCAL GOV'T MINISTER CALLS FOR GREATER NATIONAL VIGILANCE TO PREVENT AND REPORT BUSHFIRES EARLY**

### **OVER 2,000 BUSHFIRES REPORTED SINCE START OF 2024**

Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, is appealing for greater awareness and responsibility, to combat the high number of bushfires that are occurring across the island. In raising the matter in Parliament recently, the Minister quoted statistics from the Jamaica Fire Brigade which showed that in 2023, firefighters were called to put out 6,443 bushfires across all parishes. This accounts for the highest number of genuine fire calls that the Brigade receives.

“This is a whopping 81% increase over the number of bushfires recorded in 2022. Since the start of 2024, we have already had 2,134 bushfires. The Brigade is now anticipating where these fires will occur, by using the Bushfire Warning Index provided by the National Meteorological Service. These initiatives are having the desired effect, as the Brigade has been able to respond strategically and save hundreds of hectares of residential, commercial and government lands, rather than being blindsided by bushfires. While these technical interventions are critical, and reflects the seriousness of the Government’s efforts, I am still calling on our citizens to do their part, and avoid practices, such as bush-burning to clear fields, and improper disposal of cigarettes and other flammable items, to bring down the very high number of bushfires that are occurring.”

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Photo: Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Andrew Holness (right), uses a two-way radio, which is part of the Disaster Emergency Communication System during a visit to the National Emergency Operations Centre, located at the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) in Kingston on Wednesday (July 3). Others (from left) are: Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie; Acting Director General, ODPEM, Richard Thompson, and Project Engineer at the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), Dane Lawrence.

**JAMAICA NOW HAS NEAR-TOTAL COMMUNICATIONS COVERAGE TO PROTECT LIVES BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER DISASTERS**

**EMERGENCY RADIO COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT BETWEEN JAPAN AND JAMAICA COMPLETED**

The long-standing bilateral co-operation of more than six decades between Jamaica and Japan was further enhanced recently, with the completion of a special Project for the Improvement of Emergency Communications System in Jamaica. This is a dedicated communications network designed to provide and maintain constant communication between Government institutions, and between these institutions and communities around the island before, during and after disasters.

The main feature of the network is a wireless communication system and related equipment, to ensure swift and secure communication between critical Agencies and vulnerable communities through a single radio communication platform. The Government of Jamaica and the Government of Japan, through the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) have invested over J\$2 billion in the project.

In announcing the successful completion of this initiative and its handover in Parliament during the Sectoral

Debate, Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, stated that as part of the system, 15 Early Warning siren towers were built at Port Maria in St. Mary, Old Harbour Bay and the Angels to Bog Walk corridor in St. Catherine. This early warning system will transmit messages issued by the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management to residents and commuters in these vulnerable areas. It will also facilitate evacuation training and simulation activities in these communities.

“As part of this Project, 292 mobile radios were installed in emergency vehicles, to make first responders better able to coordinate emergency response activities. Additionally, 120 base station radios are now located at 14 integrated command stations islandwide. They include the municipal corporations and public health departments, fire stations, police stations and hospitals.

There is now repeater and microwave link equipment at 24 repeater sites across the country, thereby extending Jamaica’s emergency communication coverage to approximately 95%. This is very important, as microwave link technology is ideal for maintaining communications with the most remote parts of the country through every stage of disaster, from preparedness to recovery.” JICA and Jamaica have been collaborating on a wide range of mutually beneficial initiatives for 34 years.

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# HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS



## Create an **EMERGENCY KIT:**



Ensure you have a well-stocked emergency kit with essentials such as non-perishable food, water (enough for at least three days), first-aid supplies, flashlights, extra batteries, necessary medications, and important documents.

## Stay **INFORMED:**



Monitor local weather updates and alerts through reliable sources such as radio, TV, or mobile apps. Early warnings can give you time to prepare or evacuate if necessary.

## Secure **YOUR HOME:**



Install storm shutters or board up windows and doors with plywood. Clear gutters and trim trees or branches that could fall during high winds. Secure outdoor furniture and any loose objects that could become projectiles.

## Develop an **EVACUATION PLAN:**



Know the nearest shelter locations and have a clear evacuation route planned. Discuss your plan with family members, ensuring everyone knows where to go and what to do in case of an emergency.

## Protect **IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS:**



Store vital records like birth certificates, passports, and insurance policies in waterproof, fireproof containers. You may also consider digital backups of these documents.

## Avoid **FLOOD WATERS:**



Do not walk, swim, or drive through floodwaters. Even shallow moving water can be dangerous. Turn around, don't drown. If water rises inside your home, move to a higher level or the roof, signaling for help if necessary.

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