



CONTRIBUTION TO THE ANNUAL SECTORAL DEBATE

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Clarendon South West, and

Minister of Local Government & Community Development

“Local Government is Everybody’s Business – Get Involved”

TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 2013

GORDON HOUSE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Mr. Speaker, I am here today firstly because of the blessings of Almighty God with whom all things are possible. And, I fervently pray for his continued mercy and wisdom.

Let me thank Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller for her quality leadership, optimism about our future, and unquestionable commitment to creating an environment that enables the Jamaican people to be the best that they can be. I am also grateful for her continuing confidence in my capacity to lead the Ministry of Local Government & Community Development as we complete the transformation of Local Government that was started so many years ago.

I would like to recognize the presence of members of my family who have always been there for me – through thick and thin. To the extent that I am able to meet the unending demands of public life is due in no small part to their sacrifice.

It is a most fulfilling experience to work with and for the people of Clarendon South West: my Councillors, my Constituency Executive, Cluster Managers, Youth Leaders, Women Groups, NGOs, the Ministers Fraternal, the Educators, and other stakeholders for the progress and development of the constituency. They are well represented here today.



I want to especially salute Minister of State, the Honourable Colin Fagan. His quiet counsel and loyal support have been invaluable in putting our various projects on a successful path.

Mr. Robert Rainford, the Permanent Secretary, ably leads a committed and patriotic staff. Over the past year, the synergies, the level of motivation and the output of the staff clearly reflect his leadership.

With each passing day, I become more indebted to my personal staff, including my security team, who continue to allow me to tax to the utmost their seemingly boundless reserves of patience, energy, and patriotism.

I am heartened by the degree to which the Local Authorities, Agencies and Departments within this Ministry have demonstrated the capacity to rise to the challenge posed in this complex and crucial period of national development. Mr. Speaker, I cannot leave out my team of Mayors, Councillors, Chair Persons and Board Members, Heads of Agencies such as the Board of Supervision, the Jamaica Fire Brigade, the National Solid Waste Management Authority, Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management and the Social Development Commission; very special thanks to you all. I demand a lot only because I know you are equal to the task.

In the same breath, Mr. Speaker, I want to salute the work of former Executive Director of ODPEM, Mr. Ronald Jackson who served in that post for seven (7) years up to March of this year. Mr. Jackson's name is synonymous with world-class standard of disaster preparedness and co-ordination. He has held a number of posts at ODPEM, and can truly be described as 'homegrown'. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Jackson has been called to higher service as Executive Director of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) of which I am the Chairman. I have no doubt that he will do Jamaica proud in his service to the wider Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, the successes enjoyed by this Ministry to date would not have been possible without the cooperation of international donor and lender agencies. In this context, I would like to place on record my appreciation to the following:

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Canadian International Development Agency(CIDA)
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

- The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA)
- Red Cross
- CHASE Fund
- JSIF
- Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC)
- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
- Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)
- The European Union (EU)
- Department for International Development (DFID)
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
- The World Bank

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues on both sides of this Honourable House, in recognizing the dignity and decorum you continue to bring to your office, and our proceedings.

CONSTITUENCY HIGHLIGHTS:

Mr. Speaker, South Western Clarendon is a diverse constituency which stretches from the sea in the south to the hills in the north. It is the home of the world renowned Milk River Bath and a critical leg of the next major logistics hub, Vernamfield. Mr. Speaker, my vision for the Constituency remains the same; ‘to improve the lives of all citizens through social transformation and wealth creation’.

There are challenges, but we are working through them to achieve the desired goal. The lack of an adequate supply of water and easy access to existing supplies on the Vere Plains and in the hills pose a serious challenge Mr. Speaker. We are however in discussion with the Ministry of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change to:

- Rehabilitate the Vernamfield well;
- Upgrade the upper Rhymesbury system; and
- Provide piped water to the residents in the hills of Mount Airy, Darlow and Rock.

The weekly trucking of water to these areas is untenable and unsustainable.

Roads

Mr. Speaker, after years of neglect, the JEEP rolled into South West Clarendon and the following roads were rehabilitated: Artease in Content, Gravel Hill, Rhymesbury to Content, Rowington to Clifton, Sedge Pond to Water Lane through Banks and Race Course and the Rock Road. Several U-drains were also constructed in Sun Valley Drive, along Four Paths main road, Queen Street, Gravel Hill and Comfort.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our Prime Minister for rolling out the JEEP because it not only gave the constituency a well needed facelift and prevented flooding of the roadways and homes, but it also created jobs for many of the constituents. We look forward to Phase two (2) of this project.

In just seventeen (17) months, Mr. Speaker, we were able to do a number of other Infrastructural works, the main one being the rehabilitation of the Foga Road to Milk River. This Corridor is critical to the development of the Constituency because it links the Highway to Vernamfield and Milk River Bath; two (2) catalysts for major development in the country. I will continue to make representation in this regard.

Education

Mr. Speaker, education remains a critical component of the development process and the current focus is on early childhood education. According to Professor Samms-Vaughan, “early childhood development is important to Jamaica because this is the time when we get the greatest investment on education”. This investment gives the highest rate of returns and therefore, I want to thank the Jamaica Social Investment Fund for assisting in improving two educational facilities in the Constituency; the Osborne Store Infant School was refurbished and new toilet facilities were constructed at the Milk River Primary School. Food for the Poor was instrumental in the building of the Gimme-Me-Bit Basic School. We are also appreciative of the Foga Road Infant School constructed by the Ministry of Education. Mr. Speaker, this will compliment all the other works done in this area. The \$4m allocated from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), in this financial year, for education assistance will continue to assist our children.

Community Development

As the Minister with responsibility for Community Development, I am fully aware Mr. Speaker of the benefits of facilitating social activities and promoting people

participation in our communities. Under the European Union Sugar Transformation Programme, two community centres were identified for rehabilitation; the Toll Gate and Waterwell Community Centres. The football field and the multipurpose court at the Toll Gate Community Centre have been rehabilitated and the building is now being repaired.

The rehabilitation of the Waterwell Community Centre is scheduled to commence in August of this year. These two facilities will enhance talents and promote unity in the communities.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the beneficiaries, I must express my joy and pride in participating in the ground breaking for the construction of 88 houses for over 109 families now residing in the old sugar barracks in Springfield. I agree with the Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, this is truly “Transformation in Action”.

Mr. Speaker, we have accomplished much and there is much more to come:

- The rehabilitation of the road from Osborne Store to Race Course;
- The completion of the Rural Electrification Programme of which we are eternally grateful;
- The Agro Park;
- The Housing Development in Ebony Park announced by the Prime Minister;
- The well needed Police Post in Race Course; and
- River training along the banks of the Rio Minho.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the partnerships forged to continue the process to improve the lives of all constituents.

I. WE ARE AT A TIPPING POINT – IT CANNOT BE BUSINESS AS USUAL:

Mr. Speaker, this debate comes against the background of a recognition that Jamaica is at a tipping point. A point where we must make difficult decisions. A point where bold and visionary political leadership is required from all stakeholders. A point where the private sector must become more involved and raise themselves to the highest standards of ethics and compliance, and become a part of the solution. A point at which the Jamaican people must understand that for every right we enjoy, there are corresponding responsibilities.

So, Mr. Speaker, our mission is to transform people's attitudes towards acceptance of their responsibilities and not just their rights. Our mission is to unite the various stakeholders in reforming how we do business. At this tipping point, I affirm that Local Government is Everybody's Business – Let's all get involved!

Mr. Speaker, the last 18 months have been challenging, and the Jamaican people have shown superb resilience under the circumstances. There is a growing recognition worldwide that putting Local Government at the heart of development is an effective approach to addressing these challenges, and for full people participation. This, Mr. Speaker, was articulated at the 2013 Commonwealth Local Government Conference in Kampala, Uganda. It cannot be business as usual and we must all get involved!

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, the last 18 months have seen tremendous progress culminating with an agreement with the IMF. And, for my part, I want to applaud the tremendous work by my colleague Ministers in the Ministry of Finance in those negotiations. I will ensure that my Ministry, and constituency, sign on to the covenant outlined by the Minister of Finance in his opening budget presentation. A covenant which requires that the government, the private sector, and our taxpayers get involved in the business of governance by honouring their respective obligations.

Portfolio Report

In respect of portfolio matters, the Local Government team has been steadfastly pursuing its mandate covering the areas of standards setting, accountability management, legal, technical and institutional support, performance evaluation, local and international government networking and stakeholder management - all for the advancement of effective local governance and sustainable local development.

Our policies and attendant implementation strategies have been deliberately designed for their potential to impact local and national development, through the involvement of our citizens.

While I will present this Honourable House with highlights of these strategies and programmes undertaken within the Ministry itself and the portfolio entities through which it discharges its responsibilities; I hereby table the Ministry's

2012/2013 Performance Report, which has all the details and I invite my colleagues to peruse same.

II. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM MUST BE BROUGHT TO CONCLUSION:

Mr. Speaker, the matter of reform has been a buzzword in the Local Government fraternity for well over a decade. In the past, with every change in Administration, we seem to make radical shifts in our attitude to Local Government.

It was in 1947 that the first Local Authorities were elected by Universal Adult Suffrage and immediately made a positive difference in the provision of local services. The dissolution of the St. Catherine Parish Council in 1949, Trelawny in 1954, Portland in 1963 and the KSAC in 1964, sent a clear signal as to the absence of consensus on the importance of Local Government. The elections of 1969 and 1974 brought the hope of renewal and the prospect of consensus with both political parties sending strong representatives to Local Authorities. Of that batch, today we have represented in the Honourable House none other than our esteemed Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller and M.P. Pearnel Charles.

More recently, we have seen the likes of Dean Alexander Peart, Donald Buchanan of blessed memory, Roger Clarke, Bobby Montague, Desmond McKenzie, Andrew Wheatley, Richard Parchment, Joylan Silvera, Luther Buchanan, Richard Azan, Angela Brown – Burke, Denise Daley, Colin Fagan, and, Mr. Speaker, I could go on. The point being made is that the Local Government system has become the testing ground for the best of our national politics.

Historically, we had an Opposition that was not committed to the necessity of a Local Government system. In their view, centralized management exemplified by a top-down approach was the way to go. However, this approach would remove the voice of the people in the decision-making process that affects their daily lives.

On the other hand, we had a Government that was strongly committed to the delivery of services through Local Authorities as well as a participatory model of community development. We believe that empowerment of people is the only path to sustainable development - they must be involved in the creation of their destinies.

Happily, there is now consensus on the way forward for Local Government. The fundamental questions have been settled and we are near the conclusion of the drafting process for the various pieces of legislation. Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be the Minister charged with the responsibility of bringing these legislations to completion.

I must also thank the many stakeholders and the Ministers before me who all contributed significantly to the reform process - in particular Prime Minister Simpson Miller who was once Minister of Local Government.

The Legislative Agenda in Local Government Reform:

Mr. Speaker, Local Government Reform requires drafting and promulgation of several pieces of important legislation. That work continues in earnest. Last year

we reported that, along with the Ministry of Justice, we were committed to fast tracking the inclusion of Local Government in the Jamaican Constitution in our fiftieth (50th) year of independence. I can report to this Honourable House that we have reviewed a draft Bill entitled Constitution (Amendment) (Local Government), 2013, and have offered our comments. The Honourable Minister of Justice is piloting this process and the Chief Parliamentary Counsel is working earnestly to have the Bill finalized.

The key plank of the reform agenda is the promulgation of three (3) strategic laws – The Local Governance Act, The Local Government Financing and Financial Act, and The Local Government (Unified Services and Employment) Act.

The proposed Local Governance Act will be created by consolidating several existing Acts and will introduce several new concepts and tenets which reflect a modern approach to local governance and which will strengthen local self-management. This will allow Local Authorities to be autonomous and responsive to their citizenry.

The Local Government Financing and Financial Management Act will consolidate several existing Acts, and will require Local Authorities to adopt modern, internationally accepted public sector accounting and financial management practices and to be guided by domestic financial legislations, national fiscal policies and accountability standards.

The Local Government (Unified Services and Employment) Act will consolidate five (5) existing Acts relating to human resources management. The new Act will address areas that are critical to establishing a competent work-force, with the requisite skills, orientation and commitment to local governance.

The draft Cabinet Submission in respect of the three Strategic Laws was circulated and reviewed, and adjusted based on comments from the Attorney General (AG), the Legal Reform Department, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Finance and Planning, and the Police High command. Mr. Speaker, after seventeen years, hundreds of consultations, and the hopes and aspirations of thousands of people, I am pleased to report that a Submission relating to these laws has been sent to Cabinet requesting approval for the issuing of drafting instructions to the Chief Parliamentary Counsel.

Mr. Speaker, as is widely known, the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel is one of the most important and burdened departments in our Government. In addition, with the raft of new legislations being drafted in relation to the IMF agreement, and the enhancement of our crime fighting strategies, the already tedious process of drafting legislation has become even more so.

We are therefore very pleased that, after consultations with the Minister of Justice and the Chief Parliamentary Counsel and our International Development Partners have set aside funding for the engagement of experienced personnel to work out of the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel but with singular focus on the

drafting of these crucial legislative matters. Mr. Speaker, we cannot afford for these important pieces of legislation to be stifled in the process.

Building Bill

Mr. Speaker, linked to our disaster preparedness is the need to ensure the structural integrity of our buildings. Accordingly, the Building Act was reviewed – a process which started under the previous Administration. The purpose of this Bill is to improve the efficiency of the building approval process and provide a framework for the effective management of the building industry. The Bill will incorporate the relevant provisions of the Kingston and St. Andrew Building Act and Parish Councils Building Act. These legislations will be repealed on the passage of the Act.

A revised draft Bill has been received by the Ministry from the Chief Parliamentary Counsel earlier this year. A limited stakeholder consultation with a group comprising- Superintendents of Parochial Roads and Works, Building Officers, Directors of Planning and Secretary Managers from the Local Authorities was held on March 15, 2012. Further drafting instructions were issued to the Chief Parliamentary Counsel on March 30, 2013. We expect to table this new Bill before the end of this financial year.

III. WE MUST REFORM PUBLIC ORDER – MUNICIPAL COURTS & POLICE FORCE:

Mr. Speaker, crafting and passing these laws is one thing but compliance is an entirely different matter. There is an urgent need to strengthen the effective

enforcement of and compliance with the wide range of civic laws and regulations for which Local Authorities (LAs) are responsible.

Local Government Reform therefore seeks to significantly improve the capacity of LAs to enforce municipal laws. The ultimate goal is a society that is orderly, peaceful, safe and secure. Local Government can make a significant contribution towards realizing this goal. The establishment of Municipal Courts and the strengthening and formalizing of the existing Municipal Police are essential elements in improving the enforcement and compliance capability of the Local Government System.

Municipal Courts: Background

There are several deficits in the current arrangements for adjudicating municipal offences that serve to frustrate LAs in bringing prosecutions relating to breaches of municipal laws. These include the substantial costs being incurred by LAs in bringing an offender to court without recovery of these costs.

Mr. Speaker, failure to effectively enforce the full range of municipal laws has many undesirable consequences including:

- High levels of violations and non-compliance in respect of planning and building regulations;
- Uncontrolled and Illegal Street vending, particularly in and around principal market districts;
- Illegal parking and refusal to use designated bus and taxi stands and terminals; and

- Wanton disregard for proper garbage disposal by some vendors and business operators.

Establishment of a Municipal Enforcement System:

Mr. Speaker, it is for these reasons that a proposal has been advanced for the establishment of Municipal Court and enhancement of a Municipal Police Force (MPF). A Joint Cabinet Submission between the Ministries of Local Government and Community Development, and Justice has been drafted to be presented to Cabinet in this regard. It has been circulated to key stakeholders such as the Attorney General's Chambers, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Finance and Planning, Ministry of Justice, and the Court Management Services.

Mr. Speaker, for this to work, the existing Municipal Police Force will be enhanced through the provision of adequate resources, effective management and direction, and working within clearly defined parameters in close collaboration with the Jamaica Constabulary Force and Island Special Constabulary Force. While we crave the cooperation of our citizens, it is important that all arms of law enforcement are involved. Mr. Speaker, attaining an orderly, peaceful safe and secure society should be everybody's business. To this end, on May 31 this year, we graduated a new batch of twenty five (25) Municipal Police officers.

Mr. Speaker, in that same vein, we have been making steady progress with the establishment of Parish Safety Committees which is the major output of the UNDP funded "enhancing Civil Society Participation in Local Governance for Community Safety" project which has seen successful implementation of these

committees in the pilot parishes of St. Catherine and Portmore, Clarendon, Manchester, St. Elizabeth, Westmoreland, Trelawny and St. Mary.

Due to the identified need, and the success of the project, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise that the UNDP has awarded an extension for the Project to run from June through December 2013.

IV. IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY:

Mr. Speaker, improved service delivery is the mantra of this Ministry. As we ask our citizens to play their part in the business of local governance by paying over relevant revenues, it is incumbent upon us to do everything in our power to usher in a new era of world-class service from the Government.

As critical development partners the Jamaica Fire Brigade (JFB), the National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA), the Board of Supervision which oversees poor relief activities, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management, the Social Development Commission and of course the island's fourteen Local Authorities are the frontline service providers at the local level. I have no doubt that they will rise to the occasion.

Efficiency & Infrastructure in the Fire Service

Mr. Speaker, the Jamaica Fire Brigade, an entity that performs a vital service to this nation in protecting life, property and the environment, has continued to perform well under less than desirable conditions. Despite the challenges, efforts to advance the JFB's mission by continuously improving its service delivery to the citizens have persisted with repairs and acquisition of equipment, training and improvement of facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I will not go into any further details at this time as Minister of State the Honourable Colin Fagan will expound on these and other matters in his presentation to this Honourable House.

Protecting Our Most Vulnerable

Mr. Speaker, I will paraphrase Hubert Humphrey to say that "...the moral test of a country is how that country treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life; the sick, the needy and the handicapped.

By that test Mr. Speaker, Jamaica is a work in progress. It is incumbent on us to do the best we can to secure the resources and develop the policies to provide a better quality of life to those in the dawn, twilight and shadows of life.

Board of Supervision: Social Protection – Infirmaries and the Homeless

Mr. Speaker, we have continued to protect our elderly and homeless but despite all the goodwill in the world, we are short of funding to do all that is necessary; however we have accomplished much, in part through the collaborative efforts of persons who see Local Government as their business and have gotten involved.



The BOS and Volunteers feed the homeless in Down Town Kingston

With regard to infirmary upgrading, we have:

- Partnered with the CHASE Fund to construct a new ward and improve facilities at the Hanover Parish Council at a cost of over J\$36M;
- Allocated J\$1.5M to the Portland Infirmity to repair damage from hurricane Sandy;
- Allocated J\$2.5M to the St Thomas Parish Council to improve the sewage system at the Infirmity;
- Through the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) we have been able to allocate the following:
 - \$8.2M to repair the roof and fencing at the St. Mary Infirmity;

- \$6.0M to the St. Thomas Infirmary for rehabilitation and reconstruction of walkway; repair the roof of the administrative building; rehabilitation of male and female wards; and repairs to electrical circuits and chain link fencing;
- \$1.5M to the Portland Infirmary to repair the roof of 3 wards and fencing.

Mr. Speaker, we have also enhanced the physical infrastructure at other infirmaries:

- The physical structure of St. Thomas, St. Mary, Manchester and Hanover Infirmaries have been improved;
- The Matrons Quarter for St. Elizabeth and Portland were completed;
- All infirmaries were assessed by the Parish Disaster Coordinators; as such, earthquake and fire drills were conducted and their disaster plans were consequently updated;
- All these facilities now have current Disaster Plans which were approved by the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM). All Infirmaries are equipped with generators.

We will continue to partner with the CHASE Fund to improve infrastructure. In addition, we have started the installation of renewable energy system, and we will be embarking on a rain water harvesting project.

Mr. Speaker, we are also focused on improving the diet of our residents in the infirmaries by implementing food gardens at some locations. This programme will

be expanded through initial funding provided by the Ministry and sustained by the Local Authorities.

Care and Facilities for the Homeless

Mr. Speaker, care for the homeless and most vulnerable in the society requires partnerships and strategic alliances. The continued support from Government, NGOs, Service clubs, Community and faith-based organizations and many private individuals has not gone unnoticed and we are eternally grateful for their involvement in this area of Local Government. The result, Mr. Speaker, is that all parishes now have a programme for the homeless, ranging from one (1) or more or a combination of 'Outreach' care, rehabilitation to homeless persons, Mental Health Care, Personal hygiene care and/or reuniting them with their families.

Mr. Speaker, provision of a small grant to two (2) additional voluntary organizations has been accommodated in this year's budget, St. Elizabeth Care Centre in Santa Cruz and Candle in the Dark in Manchester. They have formally partnered with the two (2) Parish Councils to provide care and rehabilitation to homeless persons. In addition, we continue to provide a grant to the St. James (Street People Programme) and Kingston and St. Andrew (Marie Atkins Night Shelter and the Open Arms Drop-In-Centre). Another care facility is to be established in St. Ann, through partnership with the St. Ann Parish Council.

We expect that many others will get involved in supporting poor relief services as a number of initiatives have been undertaken to educate the public about these

services including, the development of a Facebook page for the National Committee on Homelessness in Jamaica.

The Most Honourable Prime Minister has mandated this Ministry and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security to focus on the homeless (street people) as we prepare for the hurricane season and we have taken this on board. In addition, talks are to be held between both ministries to examine an Integrated Social Policy Reform Programme through a loan request to the IDB by the Ministry of Finance and Planning.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we recognize the need for a more holistic strategy in providing comfort and care for our homeless. Therefore, the National Committee for the Homeless chaired by Dr. Winston De La Haye has been tasked with developing a comprehensive model programme for the Homeless.

Consolidate and Transform the NSWMA

Mr. Speaker, the National Solid Waste Management Authority has had to face many challenges associated with the current economic situation which only serves to worsen the inherited indebtedness and dilapidated equipment at the Authority. However, the hard working leadership and staff of the NSWMA remain resolute in their duties, recognizing the role they play in the business of Local Government, and as such have taken steps to build the capacity and improve efficiency at the Authority.

Mr. Speaker, however much we may wish to paint a rosy picture, the bottom-line is that the NSWMA is undergoing a difficult transition. Mr. Speaker, for the budget years 2009/2010 and 2010/11, the budget for the NSWMA was cut by J\$60M and J\$640M respectively. As a result, in January 2012, the Agency had outstanding debt of just under J\$1B. These payables included operational costs, statutory payments and pension fund shortfall. This clearly had an impact on the operations of the NSWMA, and in terms of financial health, the Agency has really not recovered since. Mr. Speaker, thankfully, we have managed to bring down these payables to J\$750M.

Mr. Speaker, at present, the combination of payment on outstanding payables and urgent actions needed to improve service would require a budget of over J\$8B for this year. However, the allocated budget is J\$2.2B.

The manifestations of this situation can be seen in the inability of the Agency to:

- Expand waste collection routes, and increase the frequency of collections;
- Pay all of its basic operational expenses; and
- Purchase more reliable vehicles and repair salvageable ones.

Mr. Speaker, some of the vehicles are now 20 years old. The company has a total of 127 units - 72 are operational, 12 are to be Board of Surveyed, and there are 43 in a state of disrepair.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is not all bad news. Despite the challenges, we are determined to turn things around. A comprehensive repair and maintenance programme was initiated and over 60 units across all regions were repaired.

With respect to Landfills and the management of solid waste disposal, all landfills were visited and assessed in the year under review. A plan of action was developed from reports on the systematic covering of active waste cells located at each disposal site to ensure the decrease in the occurrence of fires.

The Act which formed the basis for the NSWMA envisioned that the agency would ultimately become self-sufficient by a combination of public-private partnership, effective regulations and a lean efficient management team.

Mr. Speaker, in advancing this mandate, the NSWMA has developed a work plan, and engaged legal services, for the review and re-drafting of sections of the National Solid Waste Management Bill. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, we will be seeking to promulgate regulations dealing with:

- Licensing and Registration of waste disposal facilities and waste collectors;
- Tipping Fees to enable levying of fees for waste disposal; and
- Public Cleansing to enable summons being issued for failure to pay fines.

In addition, we will seek to amend the NSWMA Act to increase the number of persons on the Authority's Board to include representatives from the Association of Local Government Authorities of Jamaica and the Ministry of Health; and to allow the Minister to, by Order, and subject to affirmative resolution of each

House of Parliament, amend the monetary penalties specified in the Act and any of the Schedules of the Act.

Mr. Speaker, when this work programme is completed we expect stricter standards for waste management and improved enforcement to ensure compliance. The polluter will pay for littering – wherever they litter commensurate with the breach. In addition, we will consider including community service, such as the cleaning of gullies and verges as penalties for this breach.

Since both the Parish Councils and the NSWMA falls under the portfolio of the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, we will work together to ensure that:

- building permits are not granted unless plans are in place for the disposal of waste;
- Trade licenses should not be granted without plans to dispose of the waste; and
- Amusement licenses should not be granted without plans to clean up and dispose of the waste.

Too many commercial entities dump their waste on the road side or simply pay a handcart man to take the waste to the market or to areas where citizens dump illegally. Mr. Speaker, Local Government is everybody's business and Jamaica's Beauty is Our Duty, so Let us get involved!

Waste Management Strategies

Mr. Speaker, in the last eighteen (18) months, my office has been inundated with various types of offers in waste management – from waste separation to waste to energy. We are encouraged by this demonstration of interest to get involved in the Local Government's waste management efforts. This presents an opportunity for us to develop a genuine industry around solid waste. With our chronic shortage in resources, public-private partnership will be a key aspect of our strategy going forward.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Minister Paulwell and I established a Joint Inter-Ministerial Taskforce on Waste to Energy. We followed the recommendations of that report, and have held discussions with a number of interested parties ranging from 'waste to electricity' to 'waste to bio-diesel'.

Mr. Speaker, waste to electricity is just one option in waste management. And, we have proposals for other areas which we intend to take advantage of. Accordingly, NSWMA will very shortly be publishing a Request for Proposals for waste management initiatives.

We are heartened by the interest which has been demonstrated in this sector, and are confident of successful partnerships between the NSWMA and Private Investors in managing waste.

Separation of Plastic

Mr. Speaker, communities are volunteering for waste separation at source. The pilot in the MPM waste shed, which started in May and ended in September 2012, saw a 73% participation of the citizens of the three communities – Karachi,

Whitfield Town and Havendale. The project is now taking place in Manchester, and I am told there is a high level of participation. The just completed Clean School competition saw the participation of 85 schools in three of the four waste sheds. I am heartened by the level of participation of our children.



Launch of NSWMA's Plastic Separation Project

So, Mr. Speaker, we are transforming the NSWMA and cleaning up Jamaica. The NSWMA has a vision of a Jamaica with a clean, healthy and pleasant environment. Despite the lack of resource from the budget, I am determined to work with the Board and the Management to make this happen. I use this opportunity to remind all Jamaicans that we each have a role to play in securing a clean and healthy environment, Jamaica's Beauty is our duty - Get involved!

V. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT ARE ON THE FRONT BURNER:

The Social Development Commission (SDC), Mr. Speaker, remains Jamaica's most effective agency working at the community level to advance sport, social, cultural & economic development. This entity, approaches community development by drawing on international best practices where communities *are* involved in identifying and designing strategies aimed at improving their quality of life.

In addition to being focused on a strong community governance mechanism, and reliable data to produce community profiles and community priority plans, the SDC is seized with the importance of the reform of local governance and its inclusion in the constitution, and the advancement of viable economic ventures owned and operated by community based groups.

Mr Speaker, the SDC is ideally poised to support the implementation of a new local governance paradigm with its core of:

- 4637 active Community Based Organizations (CBOs);
- 415 active Community Development Committees (CDCs);
- 44 active Development Area Committees (DACs) accounting for 61% of 73 Development Areas; and
- 11 or 85% active Parish Development Committees (PDCs).

During 2012/2013, the SDC have advanced the community development programme with the formation of:

- fifty-two (52) Civil Society Organizations to include:
 - the Parish Development Committees (PDCs);
 - the Development Area Committees (DACs), and

- Development Node Committee (DNC).

Forty one (41) such governance structures have been reactivated and through the agencies intervention, one hundred and ninety four (194) such structures have experienced capacity strengthening. In addition, eleven (11) parish profiles were formulated.

These, Mr. Speaker, are of critical importance in the parish planning process as well as in the development of programmes to support the PDCs, Local Authority and Inter-Agency Committees.

Mr. Speaker, SDC started out as Jamaica Welfare founded by the Most Excellent Norman Manley in 1937. It eventually became Jamaica Social Welfare Commission and then the Social Development Commission. But, Mr. Speaker, irrespective of its name, the SDC has always been about empowerment, and we must ensure that all Jamaicans move along a path from welfare to work; from work to well-being; and from well-being to wealth creation, to quote our Most Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud that under the current leadership of the SDC, the training of the community groups has propelled the submissions of project proposals resulting in an impressive \$1billion for project and programme support. Of this amount approximately, \$283 million was from direct SDC support, demonstrated by the capacity building of groups in project proposal writing, community priority planning processes and organizational strengthening.

Mr. Speaker, the SDC's role in reformation of the governance structures at the local level, was further demonstrated with the organization of Public Accountability and Responsibility (PAR) sessions in all parishes aimed at inviting public scrutiny and support for the work being done at the community and national levels. The PAR sessions will be an annual activity to ensure that the citizenry is actively involved in the decision making processes that influence the work of the SDC.

In addition, the public was given the opportunity to interface with the Prime Minister and other Ministers of government in a series of public consultations. This, Mr. Speaker, is what transparent governance is about. It is government by the people and for the people. This will continue Mr. Speaker as we persist in creating avenues for citizens to get involved in the Local Governance process.



1st in the series of parish fora mentioned above. This took place at the Jose Marti Technical High School in St Catherine on October 17, 2012

Mr. Speaker, I want to use this forum to publicly salute the staff of the SDC for their dedicated service during a financial year filled with economic challenges. Your energy and commitment is inspiring!

VI. LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (LED) IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

Mr. Speaker, while we strengthen governance in our communities and equip our citizens to be valuable participants in the decision-making process, our never-ending quest must be to find additional ways of driving local development by providing economic empowerment to our people. It is imperative that we establish avenues for communities and co-operatives to engage in economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with commitments made in respect of Local Government Reform in our Manifestos for both the General and Parish Council Elections, the Ministry has adopted Local Economic Development as a new policy initiative and strategy to enable Local Authorities, communities and local stakeholders to play a major role in growing the local economy, creating jobs and reducing poverty within their respective jurisdictions. This will in the process make a significant contribution towards national economic development.

In accordance with this strategic direction, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry is collaborating with CARILED - a CIDA funded six year regional programme to support LED initiatives in CARICOM member states. With the recent execution of a Memorandum of Understanding between the executing Agent the Federation of

Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and my Ministry, we are now prepared to move aggressively to implement its LED programme in Jamaica.

We have identified a National Country Coordinator who is expected to be on board by July, 2013; and we have advertised positions for Local Economic Development Officers for posting in the six parishes shortlisted for selection for CARILED execution. CARILED funding includes salaries for the Country Coordinator and LED officers for the first two years of project execution.

We do not intend to confine our LED programme to the participating parishes in the CARILED programme so we have been seeking other opportunities to forge collaborative relationships which can enhance our overall LED programme. The key goals for the programme are to:

- 1) positively impact the annual GDP growth rate by the time the Programme is fully mature;
- 2) establish LED economic activities/enterprises in 150 communities throughout Jamaica; and
- 3) Support at least 300 small and micro enterprises, distributed across all Parishes, to enable them to achieve financial viability and/or to expand their businesses.

VII. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS, URBAN PLANNING AND HAZARD MITIGATION:

Mr. Speaker through the work of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), we have maintained our concentration on building resilient communities, through legislation, mitigation and improving

community knowledge and understanding of priority hazards and the effects of climate change.

In order to continuously improve service delivery and progressively advance the goal of building a disaster resilient nation,

- sixteen (16) training sessions were held which included Emergency Radio Telecommunications, Initial Damage Assessment, Emergency Response Training (JSIF-communities) and First Aid;
- National public awareness programmes were executed; and consultations were hosted in the parishes of Portland, St. Mary, St. Ann and Kingston to determine the requirements for proper communication during emergencies as well as to improve the service of the ODPEM.

In addition, ODPEM was able to review and process Ninety per cent (90%) of the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Ninety per cent (90%) of subdivision applications sent to them for comments, within thirty (30) days of receipt.

Mr. Speaker, the services of ODPEM were called upon more directly in late October when hurricane Sandy made landfall in Jamaica causing much devastation particularly in the parishes in the east and they responded. Evacuations were ordered. Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) were activated. And, \$35M was expended in relief effort following the passage of the hurricane.

Mr. Speaker, considering the mechanisms that needed to be activated and the services that were provided during that disaster, it brings into focus the Disaster Risk Management Bill which will enhance our ability to respond to disasters.

The Bill seeks to do the following:

1. Recognize existing organizational structures such as the National Disaster Committee, the Parish Disaster Committees and the Zonal Committees with their roles and functions clearly established;
2. Establish a National Disaster Fund;
3. Legally evacuate persons identified to be at risk as a preventative measure; and
4. Identify and describe high risk areas as “specially vulnerable areas” and the steps to be taken in respect of such areas.

Of particular interest, Mr. Speaker, is the National Disaster Fund. This is a matter that must command our collective attention in these times because, as we have seen repeatedly, the ravages of a natural disaster can disrupt our economic recovery programme. Jamaica currently has in place a National Disaster Fund (NDF). The Fund was established initially through edict of the Honourable Prime Minister at a meeting of the National Disaster Executive in 1995.

Mr. Speaker, given the impact of several tropical storms, and hurricanes several times over the past twelve (12) years, it is apparent that the Fund is not adequate to meet the purpose it was intended, especially in the area of facilitating rapid response post disasters (to include early recovery), nor is it able to meet the requirements for the effective provisioning of relief stocks and related activities.

An assessment of the requirements for dealing with a Hurricane Ivan type scenario showed that a minimum of J\$650Million would be required to put in place adequate supplies for 32,000 Jamaicans. The current status of the Fund is just over J\$260Million.

We are doing ourselves a severe injustice if things are allowed to remain this way. The Disaster Risk Management Bill will address this weakness in our national disaster preparedness. The latest draft of the Disaster Risk Management Bill was received by the Ministry on April 11, 2013, and we expect the Bill to be tabled in this Honourable House before the end of this financial year.

Hazard Mitigation

This year, through the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), we will continue to deal with the issues of making our communities more resilient to the possible impacts of natural disasters. We will seek to ensure that all Ministries, Departments and Agencies and key sectors of our economies, develop significant levels of Disaster Risk Management integrated into their Policies and Programmes.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall the difficulties the citizens in Port Maria had to endure in November last year. We do not wish to experience a repeat of those activities. As a result, we will be putting in two (2) flood warning systems - one (1) in Annotto Bay and another along the Milk River.

Urban/Regional Planning

Mr. Speaker, within the context of urban and regional planning, the Ministry has been driving the creation of a **sustainable urban and rural development framework** within the Ministry and the fourteen (14) Local Authorities for the development of all parishes. As a consequence, the city of Montego Bay, St. James was selected to receive support (US 1.3 million) through the Inter – American Development Bank’s Emerging and Sustainable Cities Initiative (ESCI). The ESCI is to be implemented over a period of nine to fifteen months and employs a multidisciplinary approach to address challenges facing urban areas in Latin America and the Caribbean. The three (3) areas of focus under the ESCI are:

- Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change;
- Urban Sustainability; and
- Fiscal Sustainability and Governance.

At the end of the program Montego Bay and St. James will be better able to plan for growth and solve key sustainability issues.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has been leading and will continue to lead initiatives towards the establishment of a **Kingston Lifestyle Centre (KLC)**. The KLC project is conceptualized as a strategically located, ring fenced and secure, 9.7 acres commercially valuable and community valued business project in Downtown Kingston. Its location considers 50 commercially underserved residential communities of 254, 588 residents within a 5 km radius. The KLC Project is a JMD\$6.5 billion public private partnership initiative geared at enhancing the redevelopment of these communities and Downtown Kingston.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that in collaboration with our partners, the PIOJ discussions are continuing with a Private Sector Group and the Attorney General has been written to in order to get a “no objection letter”. Consultations are ongoing with key stakeholders like the Urban Development Corporation to identify a mechanism for the sale of land to the private sector group. We expect to hold consultation with other stakeholders. These include the National Water Commission (NWC), the Jamaica Railway Corporation (JRC) on whose land the Centre will be erected, Members of Parliament, Councillors, faith-based organizations, NGO’s.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry will be using **modern technology that promotes an efficient and effective planning framework** within the Ministry and the 14 Local Authorities.

The Prime Minister in her presentation addressed business facilitation; spoke to the installation of the AMANDA system in eight Local Authorities and the eventual roll out to all Local Authorities and other key referral agencies by 2015. We are in full support of the modernization initiative.

VII. The Local Authorities



Min N. Arscott, MoS C. Fagan and Chairmen of the island’s 14 Local Authorities

Mr. Speaker, I must commend the Parish councils for their resilience and determination in fulfilling their mandates, through this difficult financial year. Quite a significant number of councils have exceeded their expectations and with the help of the Ministry. We expect that others will follow suit.

Mr. Speaker, water is essential to our existence and Local Authorities across the island have done their utmost to ensure that communities have access to treated water. The country is often plagued with drought and as such a number of initiatives were taken to boost water supply in various areas. Last year the Westmoreland Parish Council spent \$5,072,116.59 to improve their minor water supply. St. Elizabeth was also impacted by drought, and they managed to provide over three thousand and thirty (3030) loads of water to over two hundred and eighty (280) communities throughout the parish.

Mr. Speaker, several Local Authorities also undertook maintenance work on the parish catchment tanks and wayside tanks. In Clarendon several wayside tanks were installed to serve ten communities.

Mr. Speaker, economic independence of each Local Authority is a key feature of the Local Government Reform Agenda. The upgrade and sustainability of our local markets is therefore essential to the economic viability of the Councils. Therefore Mr. Speaker, the Ministry in partnership with the Jamaica Social Investment Fund and the Tourism Enhancement Fund has completed the rehabilitation of Black River Market Phase 1, the Spaldings and Rocky Point Markets in Clarendon. Repairs are being done to the Highgate Market and the first phase of the Linstead

Market renovation has been completed through the kind assistance of the Urban Development Corporation (UDC).

Mr. Speaker, St Catherine Parish Council conducted a massive registration drive for vendors in the parish, which generated much needed revenues for the council amounting to two million dollars (\$2,000,000).

VIII. A NEW PARADIGM IN FINANCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

Mr. Speaker, in the past, the Ministry of Local Government was financed by a combination of revenue from property taxes and, where there is a shortfall as there inevitably was, contributions were made from the consolidated fund. In that scenario, property tax compliance varied between 50 – 60 percent (%). In financial year 2011/12, property tax compliance was 51% or J\$1.8B, and 52% or J\$1.7B in 2012/13. In those years, the Ministry received deficit financing of J\$512M and J\$480M for Public Cleansing, and J\$1.6B and J\$250M for Street Lighting respectively in financial years 2011/12 and 2012/13 respectively. Based on that narrative Mr. Speaker, the takeaway is that at prevailing compliance levels, property tax revenues are woefully inadequate to even provide the minimal acceptable levels of service in the local government sector. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, deficit financing provided J\$2.2B and J\$700M in 2011/12 and 2012/13 respectively.

Mr. Speaker, as a part of the new financial constraints, the support that the Ministry of Local Government could depend on from the consolidated fund known as ‘deficit financing’ is no more.

The Ministry will have to pull its own weight. In other words, the efficiency in garbage collection, provision of fire services, cleanliness of markets, repair of parochial roads, and other local services will be directly related to the extent of compliance in the payment of property taxes, and the realization of other local government revenues.

In Jamaica, there is a tendency to demonstrate when roads are not repaired; when garbage is not collected on a timely basis; and when the fire truck is late. But, Mr. Speaker, there is a conspiracy of silence when property taxes are not paid by their neighbour, colleague, family or friend. Well, Local Government is everybody's business, and in the same way that the Ministry has to pull its own weight, we are calling on all Jamaicans to do their part by paying their property taxes.

IX. ELECTRICITY CHARGES HAVE TO BE BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL:

Streetlights and Alternative Energy Solutions

The Local Government fraternity like most organizations in Jamaica is challenged by the escalating cost of electricity which is threatening to affect the level of service they provide. In order to maintain and improve these levels of service, local authorities have to explore new ways to bring down electricity costs.

The Local Government Authorities are responsible for the payment of JPS bills for street lighting. Last year we paid over J\$3B for streetlights and given the changes to fuel rates, for this fiscal year, this will escalate beyond \$3.4 Billion if prudence is not exercised in the management of this service provision.

To emphasize the point Mr. Speaker, in the first month of this fiscal year (April 2013), we incurred streetlight charges of J\$247M or 41 cents per KWH - this reflects an escalation of over 105% since January 2009. That is an unsustainable and untenable situation.

This escalation continues to crowd out fiscal space which can be allocated to productive activities. The billing is based on streetlights installed, not streetlights in operation. This is as stated in the current tariff. This cannot continue.

Mr. Speaker, as a result, Minister Paulwell and I established a Joint Inter-Ministerial Taskforce on streetlights. The findings of that taskforce indicated that we could take action that could save the country over 40% of existing costs, or more than J\$1B, per year. I want to thank Minister Paulwell, his Permanent Secretary and other members of his team for this example of what true joined-up Government is about.

As a result, a Submission was made to Cabinet, and Cabinet approved action to capture the potential savings on behalf of the taxpayers of this country. The country will be advised at a later date on the specific steps we will be taking in this regard.



LED light being installed in Clarendon

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we have requested that the Bureau of Standards establish a standards committee whereby streetlight standards will be established by the Government of Jamaica for the first time at last. We have also engaged the OUR and will be making sure that come the next tariff review, taxpayers will no longer pay for streetlights whether or not they are working but will only pay for functional streetlights.

Street Light Audit

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development (MLGCD), in conjunction with the local authorities, is in the process of completing a joint street light audit with the Jamaica Public Service Company Ltd. To date the parishes of Clarendon, Kingston and St. Andrew, Manchester and Hanover have been completed with the overall programme slated for completion in November 2013. The objective of this audit is to ensure that local authorities objectively know what they are paying for.

Mr. Speaker, it is a priority of this Administration to bring streetlight costs under control once and for all. The savings of over J\$1B per year is possible, and we are

going for it. However, Mr. Speaker we need the help of the public. Therefore, effective July 1, 2013, I have taken a decision to establish a streetlight hotline in the Ministry of Local Government. Members of the public will be able to call this hotline to report defective streetlights during business hours from Mondays through to Fridays. The hotline number is 1-888-991-4617.

X. PROPERTY TAX COMPLIANCE IS A PRE-CONDITION TO QUALITY SERVICE:

Mr. Speaker, property taxes represents the single largest source of revenue for the island's fourteen (14) Local Authorities but collections have never been enough to provide efficient delivery of local services

Services Provided for by Property Tax

What are these services I speak of Mr. Speaker? Property taxes are used to fund among other services:

- Solid waste collection and disposal;
- Payment for the streetlight services;
- Maintenance of parks and gardens;
- General civic improvement; and
- Rehabilitation of the parochial road network. Property tax also funds aspects of councils' administration

Target Met

Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in announcing to this Honourable House that we have surpassed our 2012 – 2013 collection target of J\$2.8B by just over J\$5M or 0.17 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I want to use this opportunity to commend the initiatives of our Mayors, the team from the Ministry and other stakeholders including the Tax Administration of Jamaica (TAJ), that aided our achievement of our target. Equally, I want to commend those taxpayers who have paid despite the challenging economic times.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance announced an increase in property tax rates that took effect on April 1, this year. This was not done because we wanted to but because we had to improve our compliance and collection of arrears, and we can only do so with the help of our taxpayers who are the recipients of the local services that are provided by this tax.

Current Situation

Mr. Speaker, for fiscal year 2013 – 2014, the Property tax revenues will have to fund over **\$8 Billion** in expenditure broken out as follows:-

Solid Waste Collections & Disposal	-	\$3.0 Billion;
Streetlight Services:		
- Current year	-	\$3 Billion
- Arrears	-	\$2 Billion
Support to Councils Administration	-	\$150 Million
Community Support and Beautification	-	\$160 Million

Our commitment is to ensure improved quality of service in terms of consistency, effectiveness and efficiency of delivery. Mr. Speaker there are no two ways about

it, despite the challenging times we face we must make the effort to improve our local services as our consumers are far more discerning and demanding of quality. Nothing is wrong with that; we all want a Jamaica that is comparable to the best places to which we have travelled. We want Jamaica to be the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business. But, Mr. Speaker, the stark reality is that it cannot be done without the necessary revenues.

Compliance efforts

Mr. Speaker, we have worked closely with the Ministry of Finance and Planning along with other stakeholders to develop a combination of measures aimed at improving the compliance rate for property tax collections.

We note the cries of those who have regularly paid their property taxes and for some time have carried the burden for delinquents. Some of the measures to be shortly introduced are:-

- Persons and companies seeking Tax Compliance Certificates (TCC) will have to demonstrate that the premises from which they are operating have fully paid their property taxes;
- No approval of building plans or sub-divisional plans will be granted unless all property taxes are paid;
- Stamp Office will be implementing operational guidelines to ensure proof of payment of property taxes before sales agreements can be stamped;

Mr. Speaker, we will be making specific moves to recognize and reward those parishes and communities which have been consistently tax compliant. To that end, we have collaborated with the Hanover Parish Council, and the Member from Hanover Eastern, to have the roads within the Haughton Grove housing scheme fully rehabilitated. We expect to participate in the contract signing for this project before the end of this month.

Relief for the Vulnerable

Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that there are a number of vulnerable groups which will require some level of special assistance as we seek to improve our intake from property tax collections. Among such groups would be:

- Pensioners;
- those who are not working;
- the aged; and
- The very poorest among us.

Therefore, our safety net for this vulnerable group will be via the **Property Tax Special Discretionary Relief Programme**. In this case, Mr. Speaker, all Local Authorities have been mandated to reactivate the Relief committees in councils. These committees comprise representation from the Tax Administration of Jamaica, civil society, the Parish Development Committees, private sector and members of the local government fraternity to hear and adjudicate on the cases that are presented to them. Application forms for persons wishing to apply will be available from all the local authorities as well as the tax offices.

Role of Local Authorities

Mr. Speaker, as we seek to meet our target of collecting the targeted sum of \$7.26 Billion in property taxes for this fiscal year, and ensure that we have a strong momentum going forward we have devised a number of measures to support this drive and ensure that the local authorities are fully on board. We are seeking to have the Mayors become a strong voice in the property tax campaign. Four regional sessions were held – Kingston, Manchester, St. James and St. Ann/St. Mary at the council chambers so identified.

Public Education Effort

Mr. Speaker the Government of Jamaica is currently owed in excess of \$7.1billion in property taxes collectable on over 750,000 parcels of land. We need the money, and we need to deliver quality services, but a shortfall like this Mr. Speaker is not an enabling factor to our objective. It is simply untenable.

The Ministry of Local Government and Community Development has developed a comprehensive Property Tax public education programme for the 2013/2014 financial year.

Points of Collection

Mr. Speaker, our aim is to make the property-tax paying experience more accommodating for the taxpayer. To this end, we are assiduously working on the points of collection, and so far we have established collection points for the payment of property taxes with the main ones being:-

- At any of the 29 tax offices across the island;

- Online at the Jamaica Tax portal - www.jamaicatax-online.gov.jm with the use of a credit card;
- At out-stations advertised by the Tax Administration Jamaica. We will be increasing the frequency and duration of these outstations to accommodate as many persons as is possible to do so.

Serving of Notices

Mr. Speaker, all the assessment notices for this fiscal year are now in the distribution channels and the local authorities are ensuring that property owners receive their assessments either through the mail or by hand delivery. If persons have not received their assessments, they can still visit any of the tax offices where they will be advised of the amounts to pay and we again remind persons that they can pay in full, half-yearly or quarterly depending on their circumstances.

The Government is doing everything to make it easier and more accommodating to pay. We also invite members of the public to submit recommendations they may have regarding any aspects of the property tax to their respective local authorities or to the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development for these to be considered and where possible be implemented within the shortest possible time.

XI. Conclusion:

Mr. Speaker, this process of reform is a marathon, not a sprint. Regardless of how tedious it may be, we must complete the process or perish. Thanks to Minister

Mark Golding and his team at CPC; the persistence and commitment of our reform team— we are nearing the attainment of the legislative provisions for Local Government Reform.

Mr. Speaker, despite these positives, we know that the hard work is before us. We know that many vendors want a cleaner market – we know that households and businesses want a more efficient garbage collection system – and we know that our families and property owners want a dependable fire service;

We are firm in our conviction that Local Government reform is the key to local economic development. It is this Government's commitment to restore vibrancy and power to the people.

It is our unfinished task to improve compliance in property taxes so we will have the means to provide better services to our people; so that the business of Local Government can thrive.

It is our unfinished task to execute the CARILED programme to provide opportunities to the people and restore the basic bargain that makes us Jamaicans – the idea that if you work hard and meet your responsibilities; you can get ahead, no matter where you come from, or what you look like – because Local Government is everybody's business.

Mr. Speaker, it is our unfinished task to implement a municipal court that will improve law and order in our local towns, providing everyone with a safer environment, indeed Local Government is everybody's business.

It is our unfinished task to properly fund the National Disaster Fund so that we are better equipped to provide comfort to everyone after a natural disaster because Local Government is everybody's business.

It is our unfinished task to reduce the streetlight bill by over J\$1B per year so we can fix more roads, provide improved minor water supply and even expand streetlight services, services that impact the lives of everybody; Local Government is everybody's business.

It is our unfinished task to include the Local Government system in the Jamaican Constitution so that never again can the Central Government frivolously disband any Local Authority because Local Government is everybody's business.

Mr. Speaker, throughout this presentation, I have been conscious that it is my Ministry which has been assigned the major task of leading the revitalization of the local towns and communities. It is on this vital issue that the question of sustainable development stands.

There can be no doubt that this issue is going to be resolved first and foremost within an efficient, fair and reformed system of local governance. After all, it is here that the ordinary citizen and the local businesses first encounter and rely on the services of our government.

There can be no national objective or no national goal that can be created without a vibrant, innovative, autonomous, responsive, transparent and

participatory Local Government System. Simply put, Local Government is Everybody's Business – Let us get involved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May God bless this Parliament. May God bless Jamaica, Land We Love.