

## New Houses to be Built for St. Thomas Sugar Workers

Written by

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Some 486 residents of sugar barracks in Golden Grove and its environs in St. Thomas are to benefit from 225 housing solutions at Hampton Court and Stokes Hall, in the parish.

The initiative, which is expected to cost \$305.8 million, is being undertaken through the Government's Sugar Estates Barracks Relocation Programme.

Contracts for the construction project were signed during a ceremony at Hampton Court on January 24.

The European Union's (EU) Sugar Accompanying Measures Programme is financing the project which is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries through the Sugar Transformation Unit.

A total of 302 persons will benefit from 145 houses, to be built within nine months by the construction firm, Alcar Construction and Haulage Company Limited, at a cost of \$158.4 million.

Pavement and Structures Company Limited have been contracted to construct another 80 units at Hampton Court for 184 recipients at a cost of \$147.4 million, over the next eight months.

The houses are being provided free of cost to the residents, who will only pay to process the property titles by the Land Administration and Management Programme (LAMP).

Speaking at the ceremony, Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, said the developments represent "another step towards positively transforming Jamaica".

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Noting that the fortunes of Jamaica's sugar industry have fluctuated, the Prime Minister pointed to considerable changes associated with new market realities in Europe, which have impacted the sector over the years.

She lamented that despite this, not much has been done in a comprehensive and consistent manner to address the living conditions of sugar workers residing in barracks on sugar estates for many years.

Mrs. Simpson Miller pointed out that the barracks provided temporary housing for migrant workers, from various communities islandwide, who flocked the sugar estates seeking employment.

"What was intended to be temporary housing with communal facilities, evolved over time, into permanent homes in which generations of families have been raised," she said.

Mrs. Simpson Miller explained that given the prevailing unsatisfactory living conditions at the barracks, the administration would have been "irresponsible" not to respond in positive and timely manner.

"The Barracks Relocation Project was, therefore, conceived to build decent houses and communities for the current and future generations of occupants. The intention is to build wholesome communities and remove the stigma associated with living in barracks. We are not merely building houses, we are also building modern communities, outfitted with 'A' class infrastructure," the Prime Minister stated.



Meanwhile, Head of Operations for the European Union Delegation in Jamaica, Jesus Orus Baguena, said that the employees of sugar estates are pivotal to the industry and the entire agricultural sector "must be supported".

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Mr. Baguena said that as a gesture of goodwill towards Jamaica, the EU developed a package, under its Sugar Accompanying Measures Programme, to support the local industry.

He said the initiative, which was established in 2006, has so far seen some \$17.5 billion being earmarked for Jamaica for the period 2006 to 2013. He advised that of this amount, nearly \$8 billion has already been disbursed, through budgetary support, to the Government of Jamaica.

“Through our commitment to the Government of Jamaica, the sugar industry has received a much needed boost to restructure its operations,” he said.

Mr. Baguena pointed out that in restructuring the sector, the Government and the EU “have not forgotten the social concerns affecting the most vulnerable in the sugar-dependent communities around Jamaica”, hence the ensuing developmental inputs.

For his part, Agriculture and Fisheries Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, informed that the Stokes Hall/Hampton Court relocation project represents the largest of the three areas for which contracts have been executed for the undertaking.

Health Minister and Member of Parliament for Eastern St. Thomas, where the Stokes Hall/Hampton Court developments are situated, Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson, announced that several farm roads serving the communities are also slated to be repaired under the Sugar Transformation Programme.