



Director General of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), Ronald Jackson, has stated the agency's commitment to strengthening the country's resilience to disasters, which have cost the country hundreds of billions of dollars.

Mr. Jackson was speaking during a Country Risk Management stakeholders' consultation workshop Wednesday August 29<sup>th</sup> at the Jamaica Conference Centre in Kingston.

He pointed out that Jamaica remains very vulnerable to natural as well as man-made disasters, with the frequency of such events increasing over the last 15 to 20 years and the accumulated cost of damage, up to 2005, estimated at \$600 billion. "So if we begin to add on the figures between then (2005) and now, that is certainly much more significant," he stated.

According to the [Environmental Vulnerability Index, Jamaica](#) is ranked as one of the 35 "extremely environmentally-vulnerable" countries in the world, and has suffered from a number of natural disasters historically.

Jamaica's position in the North Atlantic Hurricane Belt makes it vulnerable to hurricanes, which cause high winds and heavy rains and the country's steep slopes and deep soils further cause landslides when mixed with intense rainfall.

Mr. Jackson noted that as a result of Jamaica's exposure and vulnerability, there is an urgent need for "us to improve our planning and coping strategies as well as to strengthen our awareness and management of hazards";.

"It also underscores the need for greater attention to the prevention of disasters through an acceleration of the process of mainstreaming disaster-risk management into key sectors such as agriculture, tourism, finance, and development planning, thereby building resilience," he

stated.

He said that in building resilience, it is important that all stakeholders take note of the linkages between economic development and disasters and prioritise the measures to prevent or minimise the effects of hazards, to lower the probability of a disaster and the attendant impact to the economy.

The workshop, organised by ODPEM, HelpAge International and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), was held in an effort to develop a country document for disaster risk reduction for Jamaica.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator, Dr. Arun Kashyap, lauded the move, noting that recent work done by the UN and the World Bank, indicates that for every dollar invested in minimising risk, nearly seven dollars will be saved in economic losses from disasters.

[Minimising seismic disaster risk at the local level](#) "makes good economic sense," he stated

Dr. Kashyap said UNDP Jamaica is taking the lead on behalf of the UN system in the country "to build and develop capacity for disaster risk reduction as a part of the overall sustainable human development through its mandated emphasis on crisis prevention and recovery."

The development of a Disaster Risk Reduction country document for Jamaica falls under the 'Helping Vulnerable Populations and Communities to Manage Risks Associated with Hurricanes and Floods' project, which is being funded by ECHO and implemented by HelpAge and ODPEM.

The document is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the status of disaster risk reduction in the country; the progress made in reducing risk; the definition of priorities and strategies; the major challenges faced in reducing the loss of lives; as well as the economic social and environmental impact of risks.