



The Government spent more than \$1.1 billion to repair roads across the country, in 2012.

This was announced by Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, during a national broadcast on January 6, under the theme - 'Let's Unite and Build'.

The Prime Minister further informed that the Government spent \$1.1 billion on special projects, including river training, repairing bridges and cleaning gullies.

Mrs Simpson Miller also outlined the support given to persons who were affected by the passage of Hurricane Sandy on October 24, 2012.

"In response to Hurricane Sandy, over 180 houses were constructed and handed over before the end of the year; 5000 persons received cheques ranging from \$30,000 to \$60,000 and \$200 million was provided to assist farmers. We also provided \$20 million to help fisher-folk who had lost fish pots and other equipment as a result of the storm," the Prime Minister said.

In terms of the health sector, Mrs. Simpson Miller pointed out that eight health centres were refurbished at a cost of \$100 million and four Centres of Excellence are being set up -- one in each Regional Health Authority.

"Our agreement with Cuba will see that country providing us with almost 500 additional health professionals. This includes doctors, nurses, medical technologists and nursing tutors," she said.

Mrs Simpson Miller noted that in the tourism sector, the January to November figures reveal that Jamaica earned nearly US\$1.8 billion, a three per cent increase over the previous year.

Tourist arrivals registered a 2.3 per cent increase, with 1.7 million stop-over visitors.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister reiterated the Government's commitment in providing access to affordable housing solutions for the most vulnerable members of society.

"We reduced National Housing Trust (NHT) interest rates last year, so that persons earning under \$10,000 per week could move toward owning their own homes. The NHT has also provided home grants of \$1.2 million each to low-income contributors as well as to people with disabilities," Mrs. Simpson Miller added.

Mrs. Simpson Miller said that in collaboration with Food for the Poor and the Jamaica Emergency Employment Programme (JEEP), the NHT launched First Step Homes, another initiative to help the most vulnerable own their houses and provide stability for their families.

Under the First Step programme, the NHT will be collaborating with the Housing Agency of Jamaica (HAJ) and Food for the Poor, to provide starter homes for low-income earners and NHT contributors, who earn up to \$7,500 per week.

Beneficiaries will receive a starter unit that can be easily converted into a two-bedroom home, with living and dining quarters and bathroom. They will be required to complete the electrical works, including wiring, and install their own kitchen fixtures and other amenities. Each unit will cost approximately \$1.1 million, excluding the cost of the land and infrastructure works.