

When the old Lyssons pavilion in Morant Bay, St. Thomas, is restored to its former glory, as planned, residents of eastern St. Thomas will have a brand new multi-purpose hardcourt equipped for basketball, volleyball and football.

It is one of 14 facilities within the sugar growing areas islandwide that will be upgraded to enhance the physical and social well-being of residents and foster community camaraderie.

Work valued at some \$213 million is being undertaken by the Sports Development Foundation (SDF) in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, through funding from the European Union (EU) and the Government of Jamaica. The agreement falls under the Sugar Adaptation Strategy, which supports the privatisation of government-owned sugar assets and the mitigation of the social and economic fallout from the reform of the EU sugar regime.

When completed, the St. Thomas facility will have a hard court, a football field, a cricket pitch and a community centre. The building, which adjoins the Paul Bogle Vocational Institute, will also have a stage to be used for the performing arts.

“What is expected at the end of this project is that we would have restored the facility to what it would have been in the 70s and 80s. It will be available for schools, clubs and the communities to come in and have the use of the facility and for it to become an on-going venture,” said Project Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Lisa Thompson, who has been monitoring the project to ensure that it is completed within budget and schedule.

She noted that over the years, the once popular site in eastern St. Thomas, where residents from the Morant Bay, Lyssons, Prospect and Port Morant communities would gather to participate in social programmes and sporting activities, had fallen into a state of disrepair.

Already in use

Miss Thompson said the already completed hard court is being used by young people who

turn up daily to play football, netball or volleyball matches. She said a fence has also been erected, except for the front of the facility, where a concrete wall will be constructed.

“Work is ongoing on the football field. I think they have to put a little more grass on it,” she said, adding that work on the site began in September 2012.

After construction, she said the facility will be handed over to a management committee, which will be responsible for its maintenance and upkeep. She noted that the committee, which has been set up, consists of community members and persons with expertise in sports.

“They will ensure that no damage is done to the infrastructure so the youth and the community can benefit, while maintaining the integrity of the facility,” she said.

It is her hope, too, that the committee will examine ways of earning funds to maintain the facility.

“Obviously, the use of the venue will carry a charge and that is the charge that will be used to maintain the property and to do any additional refurbishing that needs to be done,” she added.

In an interview with JIS, Acting General Manager of the SDF, Charmaine Hanson, said the Foundation, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, has started work on the implementation of facilities in Hanover, Westmoreland, Clarendon and St. Catherine. Some of the work will include the rehabilitation of club houses, the upgrading and fencing of playing fields and multi-purpose courts.

So far, she said, approximately \$38.5 million has been spent from funds allocated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

“We recently received another payment of \$60.9 million, which is expected to start work in Trelawny, St. Catherine, St. Elizabeth and Westmoreland,” she revealed.

Investing in human capital

According to Miss Hanson, work is on schedule. “We don’t anticipate at this time that we will have any major challenges,” she added.

She noted, however, that the lower than normal rainfall being projected over the next three months could affect the maturity of the playing fields. This could be addressed by the trucking of water to the areas. “So we don’t anticipate that there will be any great dislocation,” she added.

She stated that after the completion, the facilities will be handed over to a management committee in the parishes, which will be established in consultation with the Ministry.

Speaking at the signing ceremony on April 18, 2012, at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries’ Hope Gardens offices, Portfolio Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, said then that the upgrading effort was expected to last for two years.

He said investments in the development of sports infrastructure will undoubtedly benefit the nation’s people by unearthing and honing talents.

“We have to invest in our human capital, mindful that it was these very facilities, supported by the sugar industry, that produced some of our greatest cricketers,” he said.

Commenting on the project, Minister with responsibility for Sports, Hon. Natalie Neita Headley, said the project would greatly enhance the bonds of unity which are created through community sport.

She said the exploration of talent in our rural communities was of utmost importance, noting that most of “our talented athletes come from rural Jamaica”.

“We can’t ignore the fact that they all have something to contribute to the process of sports development,” she affirmed, adding that the development of sports infrastructure in rural Jamaica was critical to the development of sports.

“In going forward, the strategic placement of special courts, netball courts, and playfields across the island will be critical, so that each child can have access towards standard facilities and standard infrastructure,” she added.