

Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, says Clarendon has the greatest potential to serve as a catalyst for the expansion of Jamaica's sugar cane sub-sector, particularly among small farmers.

Addressing Wednesday's, February 6, contract signing and ground-breaking ceremony for the Springfield Sugar Barracks Relocation Project in the parish, the Prime Minister pointed out that Clarendon has over 2,000 acres of "idle" cane lands, owned by small farmers, which are ready to be "engaged" in cultivation.

Mrs. Simpson Miller said \$300 million has been earmarked for cane road improvement in the parish, pointing out that the tender process is currently being prepared with a view to the undertaking being completed and implemented during 2013/14 fiscal year

Additionally, she advised that two agro parks are being developed at Ebony Park and Spring Plains at a cost of approximately \$114 million and \$145 million, respectively.

"The agro parks development, initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, is a key element of my Government's Growth Inducement Strategy in the medium term. This (agro parks) initiative seeks to elevate agricultural production, diversify our agricultural outputs, and address every single facet of the agriculture value chain, from production to market, and (provide) support for our food security programme," she outlined.

Noting that sugar cultivation provides "seasonal" employment for farmers and other small stakeholders, Mrs. Simpson Miller pointed out that there was very little "meaningful" activity outside of this engagement during the "out of crop" season. This situation, she said, poses challenges for families dependent on the crop for their livelihood.

"In response, the Government is also working towards economic transformation of southern Clarendon through other strategic investments in agriculture. In the Vernamfield area, we are investing \$65 million to rehabilitate the irrigation system to expose our farmers to modern drip irrigation technology," she stated, while disclosing that the Sugar Industry Authority

(SIA)-managed Cane Expansion Fund, another resource option, currently stands at \$1.5 billion.

The Prime Minister noted that concerns have been raised about the sector's overall viability and sustainability, with arguments being advanced that the administration should "abandon" the industry.

In response, Mrs. Simpson Miller said the Government embarked on a transformation programme that sought to address social, economic and environmental imperatives "in a comprehensive way".

"Among the initiatives are: our focus on maximizing sugar cane production, particularly among small farmers. Under the Sugar Adaptation Strategy, which became operational in 2005, we began the privatization of the sugar estates. This is now complete. The government provided some 1,300 grants valuing some \$156 million in this area to help dislocated sugar workers cope with the fall-out from the divestment," she said.

Additionally, the Prime Minister said the European Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development has voiced support for an extension of the current quota provision for African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) sugar exporters to 2020.

"We, therefore, have every opportunity to put this industry on a sustainable path. We have to grow ourselves out of our economic difficulties. There are available markets, available lands, and available hands. You have it within you, we have it within ourselves to do it; let's do it together," she urged.

Approximately 209 sugar workers residing in sugar estate barracks in Springfield, Clarendon, will benefit from 88 houses earmarked for development at a cost of just over \$160 million under the Government's Sugar Barracks Relocation Project.

The project, to be executed over eight months by the firm, Seal Construction Company Limited, is being spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries' Sugar Transformation Unit (STU), under the Sugar Area Development Programme (SADP). Funding

is provided under the European Union (EU) Accompanying Measures for Sugar Protocol (AMSP).