

The Kingston and St. Andrew office of the Social Development Commission (SDC) has achieved more than 80 per cent of its targets for the financial year April 2012 to March 2013.

“We know that there’s a lot of room for improvement, but we are proud of the work we have done. Overall, we had an achievement rate somewhere in the region of about 80 per cent,” said Parish Manager of the SDC, Sandra Goulbourne.

She was addressing a wide cross-section of stakeholders, who turned up at the Alpha Boys’ School on Monday, March 18, for the Kingston and St. Andrew leg of the SDC’s parish meetings.

The sessions, which are being held as part of the agency’s Participatory, Accountability and Responsibility (PAR) initiative, are geared at providing citizens with updates on the work and achievements of the Commission.

Ms. Goulbourne noted that among the SDC’s most notable achievements for the year, are the establishment of seven additional community development committees (CDCs); the completion of 11 community development resource centres in partnership with the Universal Service Fund at a cost of \$30 million; with approval for an additional seven centres to be established at a cost of \$35 million.

Also, approximately 25 young people in the communities of Jack’s Hill, Woodford and Jake’s Town have been trained in beekeeping. The youths in the Jack’s Hill programme have expanded their honey production and are now distributing to major supermarkets in Kingston.

Fish rearing projects have also been implemented in the communities of Seaview Gardens, Jones Town and Papine, facilitating certified training and employment opportunities for approximately 13 residents. The SDC has also mobilised approximately 2,200 youths for the DIAGEO skills training programme in areas such as housekeeping, merchandising, customer service, events planning, cashiering, data operations, business administration, and supervisory management.

Ms. Goulbourne also pointed to gains in the areas of people participation in governance and advocacy; community capacity building; wealth creation and poverty reduction; community safety and security; and education and youth inclusion.

The Parish Manager informed that while the Commission continues to grapple with a number of challenges, including budgetary constraints and sporadic violence in some communities, the team remains committed to achieving its goals and building and empowering communities.

She noted that among the Commission's goals for the upcoming year are: developing better working relationships with Corporate Jamaica; and enhancing partnerships with the Ministry of Education, the Jamaican Foundation for Lifelong Learning, and the University of the West Indies' School of Entrepreneurship.

Among those present at the KSA PAR session were Custos of St. Andrew, Hon. Marigold Harding; Mayor of Kingston, Senator Angela Brown Burke; State Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce and Member of Parliament for South East St. Andrew, Hon. Julian Robinson; and Member of Parliament for West Rural St. Andrew, Paul Buchannan.

The SDC is expected to conduct bi-annual meetings in each parish across the island through the PAR sessions, where citizens will be provided with information on issues such as organisational targets, programmes, expenditure and relevant operations matters.

By Athaliah Reynolds-Baker, JIS Reporter