



USAID | **JAMAICA**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Remarks

by

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as prepared

for the

Rotary Club of Kingston Meeting

at the

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Knutsford Boulevard

Kingston 5

on

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12:30pm to 2:00pm

Mr. Noel Osborne, President of the Rotary Club of Kingston;
Rotarians and other special guests; good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting me back at this meeting. [The last time I was here I discussed opportunities for economic growth and the next day there was a headline referring to tax torture, which was not the focus of my remarks but here we are.]

Today I am here to discuss our support to the education sector and I want to begin by saying that I continue to be impressed by the proactive involvement of the private sector here in Jamaica. I want to congratulate this and other Rotary Clubs for their commitment to service and their meaningful contributions to the development of Jamaica's communities.

Over the last ten years the U.S. government, through USAID, has provided approximately US\$30 million toward education initiatives in Jamaica. Our focus was primarily through three initiatives, the New Horizons, Expanding Educational Horizons (EEH), and Caribbean Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (C-CETT) projects, where we reached over 60 thousand students.

With the help of our partners, we can celebrate many achievements.

For example:

- our support to NGO programs for out-of-school youth resulted in 97 percent of the young people re-entering the formal school system;

- under the EEH project we established strategic public-private partnerships that leveraged nearly \$12 million in financial and material resources for selected primary schools;
- the Ministry has adopted the Jamaica School Administrative Software, developed also under EEH as its official management information system; and
- through the C-CETT project, USAID was successful in developing reading standards that are accepted by CARICOM, and several Caribbean countries are continuing to implement these standards in their primary school systems.

In concert with a dedicated international donor group, USAID is helping the Ministry of Education to achieve its goal of 100 percent literacy by 2015. We just launched our flagship education program that will serve 250 of the lowest performing primary and all-age schools over the next three years, to support educational transformation in Jamaica. The new activity, known as the USAID/Jamaica Basic Education Project, will be instrumental in rolling out the best practices of the past projects.

We commend the Ministry of Education as several transformation initiatives are already underway. These include:

- developing and implementing more effective policies, such as *Competency-Based Transition*, which replaces the concept of automatic promotion in schools; and,
- establishing executive agencies with a greater degree of accountability.

But while there has been significant progress, there is still much to be done. As some of you know reports from the Ministry of Education indicate that last year nearly 20 percent of the students who sat the Grade Six Achievement Test performed below the Grade 4 level and nearly 50 percent of students leaving school at Grade 11 had no qualifications. Furthermore, every year approximately 30,000 youth are added to the unattached cohort that already numbers approximately 150,000. They are not gainfully employed and lack opportunities for positive engagement.

Rotarians, these are just some of the statistics that make **our** youth-centered interventions a matter of urgency. And by **OUR** interventions I mean the collective strategic interventions of the government, international development agencies, public and private sector partners.

The Rotary Race to Literacy truly represents the kind of response that Jamaica's youth need. We are very excited to support this effort. Our colleagues at the embassy are overseeing continued book donations.

I will be donating a book from my own collection, as will members of my team, and USAID/Jamaica will contribute US\$2,000 to purchase books from a local supplier.

From our perspective the Race to Literacy comes at an ideal time.

We at USAID are taking a more strategic approach to youth programs. We have nearly completed a comprehensive youth strategy that integrates all program areas, such as increasing peace and security, promoting economic prosperity, and investing in people through HIV/AIDS prevention and of course education.

We have found that there are several key elements that need to be present for youth to transition successfully into adulthood. The focus of youth development programs, whether they are entrepreneurship, education or sports for example, is almost secondary as long as they incorporate the following themes:

1. established norms and expectations that are accepted by the group;
2. recognized ways for youth and adults to relate, with specific training for adult leaders;

3. providing meaningful access to information and services;
4. building skills, including the social, communication and problem-solving skills;
5. financial resources, through appropriate micro-lending facilities;
6. fostering opportunities for youth participation, for example as tutors and leaders ; and finally,
7. fostering a sense a membership, by encouraging a sense of commitment to their schools, culture and community.

The youth strategy will position us to absorb additional funding opportunities from President Obama's Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. With critical input from local partners, USAID/Jamaica intends to:

- I. increase youth employment opportunities
- II. increase reading and math skills, particularly among boys, as we are cognizant of the trend of boys underperforming in comparison to girls
- III. improve youth access to information and key services, and
- IV. leverage greater support and stronger alliances among private sector partners.

Our efforts will highlight youth as assets and not societal burdens.

My interaction with young people from underserved communities continues to reveal their remarkable talent and innovativeness. They just need sustained efforts that give them opportunities to a quality education and the right skills so that they can be empowered to take care of themselves and their families.

In addition to the flagship education project our new activities will include the launch of Obra (Spanish for work), a US\$2 million two-year regional initiative that will: i) form private and public partnerships designed to raise awareness of issues experienced by at-risk youth, ii) strengthen youth services to improve education and employment prospects and iii) promote civic engagement among young people throughout the region. This initiative will be in the Latin America and the Caribbean with a focus on Central America, South America and the Caribbean. Jamaica is the hub for Caribbean countries such as Grenada, Antigua, Barbuda, and St. Lucia.

OBRA was designed in response to President Obama's call for collaborative approaches to engage youth at the 2009 Summit of the Americas. This project will support at-risk youth in the Caribbean, Central America and South America, with Jamaica, Guatemala and Peru being the bases for sub-regional implementation. Obra will target at least 1000 youth through education, job placement and skills training services. The launch, along with a two-day kick off conference, will be held right here in Kingston on April 14, and will be co-hosted by none other than the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica.

USAID will also implement A Ganar, a program that uses team sports to equip youth with skills to prepare them for employment. A Ganar, which means "to win" or "to earn", is implemented by *Partners for the Americas*. This program began in Brazil. With financial investments from USAID, the Inter-American Development Bank and millions in private sector cash and kind contributions, by this summer it will be rolled-out in 11 countries including Jamaica.

USAID is also working with the United Nations Development Programme and the Scientific Research Council to implement a youth employment project targeting rural and urban youth in selected communities. The project will contribute to the reduction of youth unemployment by increasing the ability of at-risk youth to access sustainable livelihood options. This will be achieved through skills and business development training and increased access to agricultural processing facilities or micro-businesses.

Some may say, USAID/Jamaica is not doing anything different. But what USAID is doing is to coalesce behind locally identified priorities. Support to youth programs cannot be achieved by any one entity. We've seen the benefits when we invest in building the capacity of local agencies and when we partner with existing community organizations. While USAID implements these programs we invite your continued support to these and other youth-focused initiatives.

My friends, while the Ministry of Education has set the goal of 100 percent literacy by 2015, we all have to contribute to this effort.

As stakeholders in securing quality education for Jamaica's children, we all owe young people who have fallen out of the formal system for whatever reasons, a second chance at a better quality of life. I firmly believe that if we stay the course Jamaica **will** achieve success.

Thank you.