



**REMARKS BY
DR. W^m. WARREN SMITH, CD
PRESIDENT
CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE
SOUTHERN PLAINS AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT**

DECEMBER 10, 2020

Greetings and best wishes for the season to everyone gathered for today's ceremony.

Prime Minister, I am fully aware of the significant challenges facing you, your government, and the people of Jamaica, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Allow me to express condolences to those who have lost loved ones because of COVID-19. I would also like to recognise those who have lost jobs, income or educational opportunities as a result of the pandemic.

Be assured that CDB remains committed to supporting your efforts to cope with and recover from this pandemic.

Once again, the vulnerability of our Region is in sharp focus. The adverse socio-economic impacts have been significant.

Border closures, global travel restrictions, and the near cessation of tourism activity since March 2020 have contributed to a reduction in productivity and to a spike in poverty.

Social protection systems, already hard pressed to respond to the needs of the poor and vulnerable, are also under tremendous stress.

What Covid-19 has done is to highlight inherent weaknesses in our food distribution system and to remind us of our Region's over-dependence on global food supply chains.

Such vulnerabilities are of even greater concern, given the agriculture sector's susceptibility to climatic shocks and natural disasters.

Behind that dark cloud, however, is the knowledge that agriculture has the potential to spur economic growth and reduce poverty. Therefore, agriculture can play an important role in Jamaica's recovery from this pandemic.

Now we are more acutely aware of farming communities like those in the Southern Plains and how they can lead the transformation of agriculture into a resilient, competitive and sustainable sector.

To do so successfully, however, it is imperative that Jamaica, and indeed all of CDB's Borrowing Members Countries, give urgent attention to investing in activities that build capacity, improve food security and, where possible, re-shore supply chains.

The potential to realise these objectives is exactly what makes the Southern Plains Agricultural Development Project an exciting and attractive prospect.

It is also consistent with a basic principle of CDB's agriculture strategy that promotes the building of resilience to unpredictable occurrences.

Key components of the Project involve the upgrade of farm roads, irrigation, and drainage. In addition, post-harvest handling facilities will be established on 795 hectares of Government-owned lands in Amity Hall and Bridge Pen in St. Catherine, and Parnassus in Clarendon.

A matching grant scheme will assist small farmers from disadvantaged groups to invest in on-farm irrigation equipment and agri-business ventures.

The initiative will benefit 70 small farmers, including women and youth, who will be able to lease parcels from 495 hectares of irrigated lands, and have access to agricultural training and certification.

In addition, 10 commercial farmers will benefit from access to leases for 300 hectares of irrigated lands and associated infrastructure.

The Southern Plains Agricultural Development Project is being financed through the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Fund (UKCIF). CDB is serving as the implementing partner for this £330 million grant programme to build economic infrastructure across the Caribbean.

All UKCIF-funded projects will focus on improving climate resilience. Therefore, farmers will also benefit from training in climate smart agriculture and be eligible to receive certification in Global Good Agricultural Practice, an international designation in safe, sustainable agriculture methodologies.

On that note, I must commend the Government and people of Jamaica for your ongoing commitment to bolster the resilience of the agriculture sector. The UK has been a reliable partner on this programme. Once again, we at the CDB would like to convey our deep appreciation to the Government of the UK for entrusting us with the responsibility of managing this programme.

Today's launch signals a major milestone for the Southern Plains Agricultural Development Project. We are now much closer to realising those objectives we have set for this project.

I wish to reaffirm the resolve of the CDB to continue to work very closely with its partners – the Government and people of Jamaica as well as the UK – to realise those aspirations. Together, we can unlock the door to our Region's food security; and create that solid platform for enhancing Jamaica's economic sustainability and long-term prosperity.

Thank you.