



JAMAICA SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUND

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\$12 Million to move Ecotourism Lodge to Export Market-Readiness.

The Bowden Pen Farmers Association which operates Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge as well as number of hiking trails in the Rio Grande Valley received goods and equipment towards the upgrading of the cabins and the overall experience at the lodge. The support was provided as part of the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) project, which is being implemented by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF). REDI is funded by the Government of Jamaica and the World Bank. The project will improve the lodge's offerings from market-ready stage to export market-readiness.

In speaking about the reasons for investment; Loy Malcolm General Manager, Project Management at JSIF, stated the project will also fund the provision of marketing and promotional services to develop and run a promotional campaign. "Essentially this will feed into the Association's aims to double occupancy by

increasing visitor numbers to 500 per year by December 2015”. This is to allow them to increase share of the ecotourism market in Jamaica.

Malcolm shared that investing in community based tourism, forms part of JSIF’ continued support of this growing niche sector, as it contributes to the nation’s economic and social development – reducing poverty, improving income equality and overall quality of life in rural areas by increasing incomes of rural residents. By creating conditions wherein community enterprises can generate improved levels of wealth, this can be achieved. Also, Malcolm outlined that “projects like this will benefit from National Community Tourism Policy and Strategy, which is in Green Paper stage which is being facilitated through a partnership with JSIF and the Ministry of Tourism.”

Linnette Wilks Coordinator of the Bowden Pen Farmers Association (BPFA) asserted that the goods received will enhance the aesthetics of the cabins, “this is a part of our marketing plan”. “We are hopeful that by the end of the project the numbers will increase. The BPFA currently has twelve members who have direct management responsibility for the business; more specifically the employees of Ambassabeth Cabins – six (6) full time and five (5) part time – and the farmers who supply food are most affected by revenue losses.

The Ambassabeth Eco Lodge provides rustic, cozy and simple accommodations, as well as guided eco/nature tours on a number of hiking trails in the upper Rio Grande Valley, in the buffer zone of the Blue and John Crow Mountains. Currently its current customer segment includes local and foreign-based University students and researchers as well as back-packing nature lovers. The cabins provide a place of stay for ecotourism and volunteerism (volunteer tourism) niches.

Included in the scope of the project are equipping with goods such as bed linen made of fleece, television, projector screen, provision of solar panels and a water purification system. The project will also cover capacity building training in housekeeping and business management.

REDI represents a focus on the economic development of rural communities through the development of businesses that can become engines of growth

within their communities. This is achieved through the access to resources that builds self-efficacy and improves the capacity of our rural communities which cumulatively will move Jamaica towards the status of a developed nation and contribute to the fulfilment of Jamaica's Vision 2030. JSIF made a prior investment in the feeder roads in the community of Hayfield which will enable greater access to lodge.

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