

Drought Conditions and Management Strategies in Jamaica

Presented By: Lenworth Fulton
Chief Executive Officer,
Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA)
Kingston, Jamaica

Background

- Jamaica lies within the Atlantic hurricane belt.
- The island experiences a bi-modal rainfall pattern with distinct dry and rainy periods, the southern coast experiencing much less annual rainfall levels than the rain shadow north.
- Over the past 2 decades, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters including drought directly affecting Jamaica have risen significantly.

Drought Monitoring and Early Warning Systems

- The Climate Branch of the Meteorological Service in Jamaica maintains a rainfall network of nearly four hundred rain gauges and rainfall recorders located strategically across the island.
- From the information collected the values for the island's drought Index are computed. This index is used to determine the onset, intensity and end of a drought in Jamaica.
- Monthly electronic Agromet Bulletins are issued to assist stakeholders with information on rainfall and drought conditions.

Vulnerability Assessment

Jamaica is particularly vulnerable to the drought hazard due to the following reasons:

- Jamaica relies heavily on agriculture.
- Predominant number of approximately 260 ,000 farmers in Jamaica fall in the category of small, rain-dependent farms, with less than two (2) hectares in size.
- The increase in Jamaica's population due to urbanization, has led to a greater increase in demand for an already limited supply of water.
- Limited/poor national water storage systems.

Strategies to alleviate Drought Impact

- RADA will continue to truck water to production areas where possible.
- Exploring the rehabilitation of existing permanent water tanks in communities across the island.
- Encouraging farmers to use efficient and economical irrigation systems .e.g. gravity drip systems, small portable pumps, tanks for water storage (black tanks);
- Encouraging farmers to install temporary guttering systems to catch water from sporadic rainfall.
- Strengthening of multi sectorial approach to disaster risk management