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COUNTRY NEWS

Jamaica

IN 1997, when Olive Morrison and her husband Melbourne lost their jobs at the banana farm where they worked near their district of Johnson Mountain, St Thomas, they resorted to doing odd bits of farming to make ends meet. It wasn't much, but that was how they managed to survive after becoming casualties of the decline in banana farming in the parish. Fast-forward 12 years, and Olive Morrison is beaming. It's a sunny Thursday morning in Morant Bay and she is at the St Thomas Farm Store to pick up her second handout of 50 chickens, feed and watering bowls provided under the European Union (EU) Banana Support project which is aimed at helping ex-banana farmers sustain a livelihood after the decline of the crop.

"I can make a living from it," Morrison enthused. "I used to do likkle likkle before (the project) but now it's OK."

She says she will be selling her chickens to small shops. Also there to collect his 100 chickens under the project was Keith Thomas of Spring Bank, an option he took after trying to eke out a living, when he lost his job in banana farming. He said he did mainly livestock farming for a while, and also dabbled in poultry farming. With the chickens provided by the EU, he sells some to the University of Technology canteen and is now trying to find markets for the others.

Mrs Morrison and Mr Thomas were at the farm store as part of the distribution project which is supported by Christian Aid and the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre (WROC). Its main objective is to assist 300 farmers with inputs in the form of seeds, fertilisers and fungicides; 100 chickens, feed and equipment for 50 poultry farmers and either pigs or goats for 70 livestock farmers.

Cash crop farmers in Trinityville were given seeds (watermelon, carrots, cucumber, sweet pepper, cabbage, turnip, corn etc), fertiliser and chemicals (fungicides, herbicides, insecticides).

Poultry farmers from Johnson Mountain, Spring Bank and Mount Vernon were given chickens, feed, medication and feeding and water pans; and other cash crop farmers from Johnson

Mountain, Somerset and Spring Bank got their distributions.

The farmers will be monitored and evaluated by experts from RADA, the Ministry of Health and others to ensure that they are following the procedures for proper farming practices, environmental considerations and proper hygiene and safety guidelines, like in the handling of chemicals. The project has allowed scores of farmers to access alternative employment, opportunities and a means of securing sustainable livelihoods.

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Zimbabwe

In June Christian Aid launched a special appeal for Zimbabwe and updated their pages on Zimbabwe at www.christian-aid.org. Below is a short message from their Zimbabwe country manager.

Zimbabwe is going through a strange period in its nation history, a two year lurch from one election to the next. Although the violence is not as prevalent as the annus horribilis of 2008, it still lurks under the surface. Christian Aid has remained in Zimbabwe through thick and thin, and while the nation is longing to stand tall again, at the moment that is just not possible.

The inclusive government is only a temporary arrangement that cannot resolve the fundamental causes of the crisis. People are therefore still reliant on external support, and for Christian Aid to have the much needed support from church leadership and churches in the UK gives us, and more importantly the people we are working with in Zimbabwe, great hope and encouragement.

With this support, Christian Aid can enable poor farmers to break their dependency on aid and just as importantly work with brave activists who are demanding an accountable government which will pave the way for peace and prosperity to return to this broken nation.

Food Security:

There have been ongoing shortages of food. One particular effect has been that people have been eating the seed set aside for planting. This will, of course, exacerbate the situation as the next harvest will be seriously depleted. Our partners are trying to provide seed for planting. Currently the lull in political conflict is allowing people to move around

