



Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers

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Report on Rural Women Empowerment Recovery Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic Workshops held by the JNRWP on January 25 – 29, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in economic disenfranchisement of numerous persons globally with women disproportionately bearing the brunt of the loss. The same is true for the Jamaican society, and rural women and their children are especially vulnerable. With recent reports in the Jamaican news media of families going hungry because of loss of income due to the pandemic, the effects of lack of food security and nutrition have become more pronounced. This untenable situation makes Jamaica's attainment of SDG's 1, 2, 3, and 5 tenuous. Further, as the pandemic stretches on indefinitely, the need to empower women for economic recovery amidst the COVID-19 pandemic became evident.

To this end, the JNRWP conducted a survey of our members to determine how best to meet their needs and desires to equip and empower them for effective recovery amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. We ascertained that even though many had been farming for decades, they lacked adequate knowledge in agricultural rudimentary and best practices to operate successful farming business enterprises. They also were not abreast with modern farming technologies, climate smart practices, and agricultural products for the best crop yields. Hence, these rural women producers needed training which was practical and especially adapted to their situations, rather than purely theoretical discourses.

Therefore, having obtained funding from the Global Partnership Network (GPN), the Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers (JNRWP) held a series of four (4) workshops with the objectives to (1) train and empower rural women producers to be better farmers thus, ensuring food security and nutrition for their families and nation, and to maximize their farming enterprises for economic gain; (2) introduce them to new and developing technologies in agriculture for greater efficiency and improved crop yield; (3) introduce them to local partner entities who are key stakeholders in agriculture and agribusiness.

In order to adapt to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic with severe restrictions on the number of persons allowed at gatherings in order to maintain the prescribed physical distancing, only a limited number of women could be facilitated at each venue. Thus, several sites around the island had to be visited by the project leader to make the appropriate selection. This was done over several days traveling in a motor vehicle rented for the duration of the planning, execution and debriefing of the project. Hotel accommodation was also required. Given the restrictions on the numbers of persons who could be physically present at each venue, to reach a wider audience and allow a greater number of persons to benefit from the information, the JNRWP decided to live stream each workshop via Facebook and/or Zoom with a team member responsible for monitoring those media.



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A workshop was held in each of the JNRWP's four organizational regions as follows:

1. Central region on Monday January 25, 2021 at the Mandeville Hotel
2. Eastern region on Tuesday January 26, 2021 at the College of Agriculture, Science and Education (CASE)
3. Northern Region on Wednesday January 27, 2021 at the Village Academy School of Agriculture
4. Western Region on Thursday January 28, 2021 at the Rock Wharf Luminous Lagoon

GPN Workshop in the Central region

The workshop in the Central region was on Pest Management and Control. Twenty (20) face-to-face attendees were present with others joining via live stream on Zoom and Facebook. Also present were 5 agronomists and plant scientists from our partner entity Agricultural Chemicals Plant Caribbean Ltd (Ag Chem). They presented rudimentary and best practices in managing and controlling pests to assure maximum crop yield and better return on investment, and highlighted the efficacy of their products which are developed in the Caribbean to combat pests commonly encountered by farmers here. The importance of the workshop to the development of rural women was further reinforced by the attendance and participation of the Acting Director, Community Liaison of the Bureau of Gender Affairs, Ministry of Gender, Jamaica.

GPN Workshop in the Eastern region

The workshop in the Eastern region was on Pest Management and Control. Held at the College of Agriculture, Science and Education (CASE), Jamaica's premiere specialist agricultural tertiary institution, seventeen (17) face-to-face attendees were present with others joining via live stream on Zoom and Facebook. Also present were 5 agronomists and plant scientists from our partner entity Agricultural Chemicals Plant Caribbean Ltd (Ag Chem). Akin to their colleagues in the Central region, they presented rudimentary and best practices in managing and controlling pests to assure maximum crop yield and better return on investment, and highlighted the efficacy of their products which are developed in the Caribbean to combat pests commonly encountered by farmers here. However, the tour of the demonstration and commercial farms at CASE, where Ag Chem's products are used, made the workshop more practical and meaningful to this group of attendees. Also, they were introduced to protective farming, and aquaponics and hydroponics farming technologies which foster efficient high yield in a controlled environment.

GPN Workshop in the Northern region

The workshop in the Northern Region was on General Nutrition and Agronomy. Held at the Village Academy School of Agriculture, twenty-one (21) face-to-face attendees were present with others joining via live stream on Zoom and Facebook. The presence of the representative from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) which guides the operations of the JNRWP, was testament to the importance of the series of workshops being held. Also present were four (4) agronomists and plant scientists from our partner entity Newport



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Fersan (Jamaica) Ltd who presented on the rudimentary and best practices in plant nutrition and agronomy. Their training on soil types/quality, soil preparation and plant nutritional needs throughout the growth and production cycle and appropriate fertilizers was instructive for the participants. Also, they were introduced to soil and water testing with the pH meter and other appropriate equipment and made to understand the importance of knowledge of soil quality to inform their farming decisions and practices.

GPN Workshop in the Western region

The workshop in the Western region was on General Nutrition and Agronomy. Eleven (11) face-to-face attendees were present with ten (10) others joining via live stream on Zoom. The continued presence at the final workshop of the representative from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) which guides the operations of the JNRWP, was further affirmation of the importance of the series of workshops being held. Also present were four (4) agronomists and plant scientists from our partner entity Newport Fersan (Jamaica) Ltd who presented on the rudimentary and best practices in plant nutrition and agronomy. Their training on soil types/quality, soil preparation and plant nutritional needs throughout the growth and production cycle and appropriate fertilizers was instructive for the participants. Also, they were introduced to soil and water testing with the pH meter and other appropriate equipment and made to understand the importance of knowledge of soil quality to inform their farming decisions and practices. The purposes of these pieces of equipment and the information shared were made more practical on the visit to the site of the Trelawny Pride project lands which will be farmed by this group of women. There, the agronomists and participants interfaced on matters specific to the farming practices appropriate to that parcel of land.

Evaluation of workshops

Participants of the workshops completed the GPN Workshop Evaluation form and provided valuable feedback to help determine whether the objectives of the JNRWP as previously stated were achieved.

Objective #1: Train and empower rural women producers to be better farmers thus ensuring food security and nutrition for their families and nation, and to maximize their farming enterprises for economic gain

With the partnership of Ag Chem Ltd and Newport Fersan Jamaica Ltd the JNRWP achieved objective #1. Over 79 women (other persons who were not counted joined via Zoom and Facebook live stream) were trained in Pest Management and Control and General Agronomy and Nutrition empowering them to utilize their newly acquired knowledge to more successful farming. Furthermore, to ascertain whether the information had been assimilated by the attendees, both partner entities administered quizzes at the end of their sessions with several participants scoring 100%. Each of the 79 attendees was awarded a certificate of participation in the topic of the relevant workshop attended.



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Also, the attendees' own comments on their evaluations attested to the achievement of objective #1. For example, one participant in the Pest Management and Control workshop wrote, 'this was an excellent workshop and I think it has covered everything that us farmers need to know about chemicals and the types to be used for each type of insect'. Another writing on the new insights gained said, '...pest and disease identification and treatment in the crops I produce. Also, how to manage my production to earn more'. Also, from the General Nutrition and Agronomy workshops, one participant wrote about new insights gained, that 'I have learnt that farming as a business is costly and requires scientific and technological knowledge for high yield'. Then as a prime example of the sense of empowerment gained, one woman wrote, 'I think this motivation will lead me to higher heights. It will help me to encourage others about farming and how important it is to take care of our land and crops'.

Objective #2: Introduce rural women producers to new and developing technologies in agriculture for greater efficiency and improved crop yield

Objective #2 was achieved across all presentations. From the components on the administration of pesticides and herbicides with adjuvants to the demonstrations of soil and water testing with the pH meters to the best practices in farming in action at CASE including climate smart practices such as greenhouse farming, hydroponics and aquaponics, to the new nanotechnology high yield fertilizer blend by Newport Fersan (Jamaica) Ltd, the women were impressed by the training obtained. The participants also attested to this with one commenting on insights gained, '...learn how to read the pH meter'. Another commenting on Newport Fersan's nanotechnology fertilizer package kit said it, 'is quite interesting and (I) will be implementing it on my farm. This is what farmers are looking for – 30 times more yield'.

Objective #3: Introduce rural women producers to local partner entities who are key stakeholders in agriculture and agribusiness

Objective #3 was achieved at all four workshops. The participants met and interacted with agronomists and plant scientists from two of Jamaica's leading players in the agriculture sector – Agricultural Chemicals Plant Ltd and Newport Fersan (Jamaica) Ltd. They were introduced to the offerings of each company and the benefits to their farming enterprises. Also, they interacted with the Acting Director, Community Liaison of the Bureau of Gender Affairs, the department within the of the Ministry of Gender, Government of Jamaica, that is charged with Policy Development, Public Education and Training and Project Planning and Monitoring, thereby representing gender related matters including those pertinent to women in agriculture. Then, they interacted with the representative from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), an organization whose objectives include increasing the contributions of the agriculture sector to economic growth and sustainable development, and contributing to the well-being of all rural dwellers, plays an integral role in rural development including rural women producers.



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Conclusion

The Rural Women Empowerment Recovery Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic Workshops funded by the GPN were successfully planned and executed in the four organizational regions of the JNRWP. It was instructive to note that key among the women's recommendations for future workshops were topics including Financial Management of a Farm, and Marketing Produce. This points to the clear intent and desire of these rural women producers to treat their farms as business enterprises, but they need training and empowerment to do so successfully.

The impact of the workshops is already attracting more positive attention to the JNRWP's work because based on the success of the project, the office of the Minister of Agriculture has reached out to us wanting to know how they can partner for more training and empowerment activities for rural women producers in the future. While we will explore such a partnership, the current COVID-19 pandemic is putting an increasing strain on the already meagre coffers of the Government of Jamaica which will limit their ability to adequately provide funding. Thus, in order to ensure that women recover successfully amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and play their role in contributing to Jamaica's meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals, more funding by the GPN to help them accomplish these goals for their farming enterprises and ensure food security and nutrition for their families and nation, will prove to be continuously wise and profitable investments.