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Jamaica, Factor: Water & Sanitation

Clarity for Jamaica's Water & Sanitation

Jamaica has a population of 2,969,617 according to the Worldometer. With this many people it directs me to think about their government. I discovered that Jamaica is a parliamentary democracy based upon the British Westminster model and is a member of the British Commonwealth. In Jamaica 62 percent of the land is agricultural (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2017). During my research I found that in Jamaica they commonly export sugar, bananas, rum, and coffee. Because my parents have traveled to Jamaica I was curious about the climate and geography of Jamaica. I discovered that temperatures range from between 22°C and 31°C. Between June and November Jamaica is prone to hurricanes. Jamaica has a varied topography with rugged mountains, some of which are volcanic, and narrow valleys plus coastal plains can be found in this country. (Country Studies, 2017) In Jamaica the average farm size is 1 hectare.

My parents worked with different families while they were in Jamaica. As I read different resources connected to this country I did identify specific points related to the typical Jamaica family. I found out that the average household size in Jamaica is 3.1 people per household. Because tourism is very important to Jamaica, many Jamaicans commonly work in hotels, restaurants and shops. The average wage in Jamaica is 2,743,344 JMD (Average Salary Survey, 2021). I found that 97% of the people in Jamaica receive 238,307 JMD which is equal to 1,587 in United States dollars on an annual basis.

In my articles of research I found an article highlighting the typical Jamaican meal. Three meals a day are important to the Jamaican people. Breakfast food for Jamaican families often include sardines, eggs, and banana porridge or corn meal. Noon lunches might include cocoa bread with meat loaf. For evening meals they commonly eat “rice and peas with either chicken or curry goat along with tossed salad, and a baked sweet potato.” (Jamaicans.com)

Producers in Jamaica raise “sugar, bananas, coffee, cocoa, citrus, and pimentos. Jamaica exports a great deal of sugar to the United Kingdom”. Coffee is Jamaica’s “third most important crop with exports increasing by approximately eight percent each year.” (New Agriculturist, 2004)

I learned that livestock provides food sources for the Jamaican people. “There has been an increase in chevron (goat) and mutton (sheep) production. Jamaicans have selected white meats over beef as the latest trends have shown. (New Agriculturist, 2004) It was interesting to learn that Jamaica has “three major grocery store chains.” (Casey, 2009)

When I focused on Jamaica and their education system, I found that Jamaica is “the third-largest English-speaking country in the Americas after the United States and Canada.” (Trines, 2019) People in Jamaica are required to attend school through grade 6 and it is free. These schools may be owned by the state or privately-owned school. Students often attend high school, which is also free, through age 17. The Jamaican government has made an effort to improve Jamaica’s secondary school system. Jamaica

believes that library books are important and internet access is critical. Jamaica offers education through specialized trade schools often in the areas of agriculture, automotive, construction, and clothing as examples. Jamaica does offer a tertiary education which is referred to as their university system. (Scholaro, 2021)

Jamaica's health care system is important to the citizens of Jamaica. It is described as less than ideal. The Ministry of Health (MOH) in Jamaica has set up a framework for the health care system. Jamaica relies on imports of drugs, healthcare equipment, and related supplies. Jamaica's health insurance is only connected to ten percent of its population. I did find that if you traveled throughout the island you would find 30-40 hospitals or clinics in various areas of the island. They do provide ambulance services. Overall, Jamaica's health care system needs improvements. (TFG Global, 2021/)

Jamaica does provide basic utilities related to clean water, toilets, electricity, telephones, roads and local markets. Their water is provided by the National Water Commission (NWC). Many homeowners keep cement or plastic tanks to store their water in. Communities have public wells at the entrance of the different towns throughout Jamaica. Electricity is provided by Jamaica Public Service Company (JPSCO). There is low efficiency connected to the supplies of electricity throughout the country. This is another area that needs improvement within the country. (Bredah, 2008) I discovered that there are few public toilets and those that exist are undesirable. Many restaurants in the urban areas do have restrooms but usually they do require a purchase.

I learned through another article that 98% of Jamaicans in urban areas have access to drinking water and 88% in rural areas. I did discover that there is a lot of trash throughout the urban areas. It is sad to realize that many of the public waste removal systems are poor leading to contaminants from waste seeping in the water. Jamaica has not trained their people in maintaining sanitation systems. (Carter, 2020)

Major barriers for families include the fact that droughts have impacted certain areas of Jamaica. This has left families with a lack of drinking water. (Wright, 2016) Lack of nutritious food is a concern. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, it states,

Still, economic access to food remains the major cause of the nutritional problems assessed in the country. Among the Jamaican population, 19% are living below the poverty line, a large number of which lives in the rural areas, where a lack of adequate socio-economic infrastructures is observed. The high level of malnutrition observed in the main cities also can be related to a high level of unemployment.

Water quality continues to be an item of high concern for the Jamaican populations. There is hope as there are 266 groundwater sampling points throughout the country. Many of the water problems come from sewage effluent. Current tests are carried out to identify nitrates, sodium, chloride, sulphate, and total dissolved solids, (WRA, 2019)

There are still remaining problems in Jamaica connected to water quality. According to the United Nations Water Global Analysis and Assessments of Sanitation and Drinking Water, there are plans or policies beginning to shape for maintaining rural and urban sanitation. There is an existing challenge to

maintain water supplies in rural areas over a long period of time, especially in seasons of drought. The majority of women do not take an active role involving themselves in the formation of law and policy connected to water and sanitation. (World Health Organization, 2018) Most recently, an article mentioned how “Five schools in rural Jamaica have benefited from a Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) ‘Training of Trainers’ Workshop, organised by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF).” It was COVID-19 that brought about this workshop. (Loop News, 2020) Improvements are being made in high poverty rural areas. According to the borgenproject.org, “access to household running water remains something that most residents living in rural Jamaica have been without for most of their lives.” (Wright, 2016) When studying the urban area, it stated,

Water storage levels at the Mona Reservoir have depleted significantly to 32.8%. This reservoir serves as a critical source of water for the island. In addition, water levels at the Hermitage Dam have depleted by 44.2 percent of its capacity. Individuals living in the outskirts of the urban area or in illegal settlements have little or no access to piped water supply.”

(Wright, 2016)

According to the Water Security Solutions Centre it stated, “Jamaica’s water security is severely compromised.” Additionally, this article pointed out that, “With June 2019 seeing Kingston’s hottest day and El Niño conditions likely to persist throughout the summer, Jamaica’s water woes seem set to continue. With a changing climate, drought, limited freshwater supplies and intolerable network losses.” (NWC, 2019)

When I think about solutions for Jamaica connected to water and sanitation, I believe it is important to first look at improving their public restrooms and facilities. If these are going to be improved people need to be educated and trained about them. This will require communicating and working with school leaders. Education about sanitation needs to be taught within all grades. Their specialized trade schools need to offer programs on sanitation and plumbing. There are existing programs where funds can be received. An example of this was through the Jamaica Social Investment Fund that I discussed earlier in the paper.

Water quality and sanitation teams can be formed within Jamaica. Our country can send trained people to Jamaica to train team leaders within their country. These team leaders can begin to work with water quality and sanitation teams that can be formed within different communities throughout Jamaica. These teams should involve both men and women that work within and represent these Jamaican communities. This may require some additional education so that all people involved value everyone’s opinion and input for improved water and sanitation systems. When people, in our country, help people in other countries we can learn and gain increased knowledge that may turn out to help even more countries including our own United States. When we act to help others we build a culture of caring and reaching out so that others can build better lives. It seems natural that our lives and culture will improve when we work to help other countries improve theirs.

Surveys can be carried out to identify what is lacking for rainwater collection. Once this is identified, the information can be used to make decisions on how to better handle water supplies during seasons of drought. Jamaica’s government can act as an agency to collect this information.

In conclusion, Jamaica is a beautiful country that needs improvements in their water and sanitation systems. It is my goal to visit Jamaica as my parents have done. Perhaps my future will hold an opportunity to help make a difference for the people, communities and environment of Jamaica.

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