

Opposition MP Suggests Cloud Seeding

The government has been asked to give consideration to undertaking cloud seeding, as one of several possible measures to counter the effects of the current drought.

Cloud seeding is the technique of stimulating or enhancing rainfall, by distributing dry ice crystals or silver iodide particles over developing storm clouds, in a specific area of the atmosphere. This was one of three mitigation measures suggested by Opposition Member of Parliament for Eastern Westmoreland, Luther Buchanan, during his presentation in the 2010/11 Sectoral Debate in Parliament on Wednesday (May 12). The others were: damming and desalination. While acknowledging that, except for cloud seeding, these solutions would require "massive infrastructural work, he argued that they were necessary and called for development of a drought policy to drive the mitigation process. Noting that weather patterns have changed "somewhat", resulting in the protracted drought, Mr. Buchanan contended that it cannot be "business as usual". "The impacts of droughts are very diverse and, most times, create rippling negative effects, especially since the first order of impact is usually agriculture, production and tourism," he said. He added that it is critical to develop a drought policy to drive drought mitigation, and actions and programmes in the areas of agriculture, production and tourism, as well as public health and education. Noting that cloud seeding has been used as a method of inducing rain since the 1940s, Mr. Buchanan pointed out that the practice is undertaken in some 24 countries globally, and is also for purposes other than inducing rain. He noted China and Cuba as examples of countries which have used cloud seeding. Regarding damming, Mr. Buchanan said this was an effective method of harvesting rain during the rainy months. "It is not that there isn't enough water to tide over to the dry periods, but harnessing and harvesting for the periods of drought is of absolute necessity," he contended. Regarding desalination, which entails the removal of salts and other chemicals from water, Mr. Buchanan noted that this is nothing new "to our shores". He pointed out that three of the island's leading beverage manufacturers currently employ the technology in their operations. Government Member of Parliament for South West St. Ann, Ernest Smith, who also spoke during Wednesday's debate, called for the Building Code to be amended to make it mandatory for water tanks to be designed in the construction plans for houses, to facilitate householders harvesting rain water for storage and eventual use. "I recall, as a child growing up, the first thing that my father did before he built his house, he built a storage water tank," Mr. Smith noted. He said that in rural Jamaica, when there is no water supply system or scheme and people continue to build houses without water tanks, drought periods will continue to put the Members of Parliament and Government resources under tremendous pressure. "It is my view that the building code, particularly in rural Jamaica, should be amended to make it mandatory that, if you are building a house, school, anything, where there is no water supply system, you must build a water tank for the harvesting of rain water," Mr. Smith asserted.