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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HEART Trust NTA European Union Banana Sector Retraining Project wraps up last Career Counselling Workshop in Portland

Career counselling workshops run by HEART Trust/NTA in a project for displaced workers and farmers in the banana industry ends this week as participants prepare for vocational training in March. The agency's officials say the European Union Banana Sector Retraining Project has been greeted with enormous enthusiasm from Jamaica's six traditional banana growing parishes.

The workshops featured career counselling, motivational speeches and try-a-skill exercises where participants got a taste of new skills such as housekeeping, construction and agricultural applications.

The workshops are used to research what skills these workers already have and evaluate what skill sets they would like to learn and receive certification within. A training needs assessment for the beneficiaries has already begun and starting in February participants will be selected for entry to the vocational skills and computer based literacy and numeracy training parts of the project.

Selected participants from St. James, St. Catherine, Portland, St. Thomas, St. Mary, and Clarendon will be introduced to skills such as food and beverage services and agricultural processing. Prevocational skills will also be taught to participants, some of whom will be learning with the aid of Information and Communication Technologies, thereby exposing participants to computers.

HEART is implementing the workshops, assessment and training in collaboration with its project partners. HEART and the European Union funded the project to retrain those affected by the transformation in the banana industry. Participants also include those whose jobs may disappear because of loss of preferential treatment in the European market. The project will teach participants modern skills for transition to new areas of employment or skills to improve banana productivity.

When it ends in December 2009, there will be a phase two designed from the results of phase one. Phase one research will also influence the design and implementation of training and certification programmes from the HEART Trust NTA and other institutions. Phase two is intended for a larger target group.

The ultimate goal of the EUBSR Project is to ease participant's uncertainty about their future and give them sustainable skill sets.

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