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Senator Charles confident that DIA Labs will transform nation's youth

Over 100 at-risk youth have benefitted from access to the Democratizing Innovation in the Americas (DIA) Lab Project in Jamaica.

The project, which is funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Citibank and implemented by The Trust for the Americas, Organization of American States (OAS) and Institute of Law and Economics (ILE), equips urban youth to be innovators by training them in cutting-edge technologies and giving them the tools necessary to transform their communities.

Speaking at the inauguration of the DIA Lab, Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security, Sen. the Hon. Parnell Charles Jr., endorsed the project and remarked that as a developing country, *“We are a land surrounded by water but we are thirsty for innovative minds to address challenges facing our country.”*

He emphasized the importance of partnership which affords these golden opportunities and encouraged the partners to continue developing the labs as they create a collaborative space for youth to tackle several challenges that confront Jamaica.

The State Minister continued “...*we demonstrate our collective belief in the power of several young Jamaicans we know will create and launch over 60 innovation projects making 37 communities across Jamaica proud*”.

This sentiment was shared by Ms. Linda Eddleman, Executive Director for The Trust for the Americas who explained that “*The objective is to give them (the youth) a space to create new ideas and receive state-of-the-art training with the usage of collaborative tools. The labs will also facilitate the transfer of ideas into programmes that can transform Jamaican citizens*”.

She welcomed the attendees who included State Minister in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, Hon. Floyd Green; OAS representative in Jamaica, Ms. Jeanelle Van Glaanenweygel; Country Director of Citibank in Jamaica, Ms. Eva Lewis and other distinguished guests.

At least one in every three youth between the ages of 15- and 24 is confronted with the issue of unemployment reported State Minister in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, the Hon. Floyd Green. He further acknowledged that it poses a significant problem to national development. He further stated, “*Jamaica has the most creative youth in the world and this DIA project is providing these youngsters with a ‘new path’ to put their energies and ideas into creating new solutions.*”

Minister Green concluded that even though the labs are urban labs, he anticipates the further extension into rural spaces as he is rooting for his ‘bread basket’ parish, St. Elizabeth.

Mr. Odell Marsh, one of the beneficiaries of the project who currently lives in Jones Town, said ***“I am in my 20s, the eldest of six children. I see violence every day. However, I see myself as a beacon of hope and light to encourage persons to choose a different path. I want to sell Brand Jamaica and give persons something tangible to use on their smart phones.”***

The project is being implemented in 24 countries and targets young people aged 16 to 30 particularly in vulnerable communities with a hope to transform them into critical, creative and innovative thinkers.