

## [Earth Today | NGO Stays Course To Make Better Use Of Cockpit Country Ecotourism Offerings](#)

Published by: Jamaica Gleaner on Thursday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
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THE SOUTHERN Trelawny Environmental Agency (STEA) is poised to take greater advantage of the magic that is Jamaica's Cockpit Country, from its rugged terrain and scenic beauty to the flora and fauna for which it provides a home, as well as its people.

The foundation for this was laid in part by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund's Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), which helped to make STEA's Cockpit Country Adventure Tours (CCAT) a reality.

Under the REDI programme, STEA's adventure tours became a licensed community tourism operation complete with 600 metres of walking trail complete with safety rails, posts and signage that has been put in. Safety equipment has also been provided, including helmets, headlamps and flashlights; and a new kiosk, with seats, sanitary conveniences and changing rooms constructed.

Still, STEA boss and head of CCAT, Hugh Dixon, said there is still work to be done when it comes to the marketing of the entity. It is work that they anticipated would have been financed through REDI.

"From our end, we are appreciative of what we have achieved, but we know that if the marketing component had been done as we requested, it would represent a solid intervention here in Cockpit Country," he said.

"But having been three-quarters implemented, the benefit of that three-quarters has resulted in a progressive increase of our numbers and our meeting the standards to become a licensed entity," he conceded.

Tourism specialist at JSIF, Beverly Stewart, said she was well aware of the challenges facing CCAT but that as the REDI programme comes to an end, there is no available funding to finance any further individualised marketing intervention for the entity.

### **Individualised Programme**

"At this stage, we would not be going back to do an individualised programme for CCAT. But I know their challenges. I have spoken to Mr Dixon on numerous occasions and anything we can do to help him take the process forward, we will do," she told **The Gleaner**.

One of those options, Stewart said, is for CCAT to market its product through the national community tourism portal [www.moretojamaica.com](http://www.moretojamaica.com) that was set up under the project.

"This portal represents licensed community tourism enterprises right across the island. Providing you are licensed, you can be accommodated on the portal and can legally be represented by the Tourist Board," she said.

Meanwhile, Dixon said they would continue to do what they can on their own.

"We have started to do the little we can do. We just have to use our meagre resources and address it piecemeal, and we are not going to stop. We are not going to discontinue what we are doing, but it is not at the place at which we would have liked had that component been in place," the STEA boss said.

They are, Dixon added, also on the hunt for additional resources to develop and implement a rebranding plan.

"We are actively looking elsewhere while drawing on our own creativity and our own resources. One is appreciative of the fact that the EFJ (Environmental Foundation of Jamaica) is issuing grants again and we are hoping that this is one gap that they can fill," Dixon said.

CCAT - a lifeline for the cash-strapped STEA, which works to conserve the natural resources of the ecologically sensitive and biodiversity-rich Cockpit Country - currently employs 10 to 12 team members and serves, on average, 60 customers per month. These customers come to enjoy caving, which costs locals \$3,500 and foreigners US\$60; hiking, which cost locals \$2,000 and foreigners US\$30; as well as birdwatching, which cost locals \$3,500 and foreigners US\$60.

"For people who want to overnight, we provide accomm-odation through our community home-stay programme. Every-thing we do has a benefit that must be derived at the community level," Dixon said.