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HOLDING UP YAAD: DIASPORA SUPPORT IN JAMAICA'S HURRICANE RECOVERY

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Abstract

Jamaica's vulnerability to climate change means that hurricanes routinely inflict human, social, and economic consequences that overwhelm public infrastructure. In this context, the Jamaican diaspora has actively mobilised financial and material support for post-hurricane recovery. This study examines the role of diaspora funding in supporting Jamaican hospitals and schools after hurricanes since the 2000s, using thematic qualitative content analysis of 198 articles drawn from newspapers, official communications from the Jamaica Information Service, and press releases from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. This study explores how diaspora funding complements or fills gaps in public institutional support and how factors such as trust and perceptions of government accountability shape its effectiveness. Findings reveal that while diaspora support provides vital relief and strengthens community resilience, it also raises critical concerns about the state's capacity for disaster recovery. The study suggests that diaspora engagement should be viewed beyond emergency assistance; it is a strategic partnership in addressing the long-term challenges posed by climate change. It challenges conventional, state-centric approaches to disaster recovery. These findings have implications for social workers and policymakers seeking to address post-hurricane trauma, deliver psychosocial interventions, support community wellbeing, and respond to the ongoing impacts of hurricanes in climate-vulnerable societies. By mobilising resources and strengthening support networks, diaspora outreach can complement social work interventions and enhance recovery efforts for communities, underscoring the need to integrate diaspora engagement into broader frameworks of disaster recovery and social protection.

Keywords: Hurricanes, Diaspora, Social Work, Climate Change, Yaad, Jamaica

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When a hurricane strikes a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), the destruction extends far beyond the immediate disaster. In Jamaica, recovery and reconstruction are a collaborative effort, with domestic and international actors sharing responsibility for rebuilding. Since the 2000s, intensified climate vulnerability has left Jamaica exposed to severe hurricanes, which cause human, social, and economic losses and disrupt the delivery of essential services like health and education. Jamaica is among the Caribbean's most environmentally vulnerable countries, with natural disasters inflicting human and infrastructural losses and imposing considerable macroeconomic burdens (Strobl, 2012). Beyond geographic vulnerability, the compounded realities of climate change reflect fragile economic structures and inadequate global financing mechanisms that leave Jamaica perpetually on the frontlines of crisis. These realities invite a reimagining of the diaspora as a viable actor in post-crisis responses to climate disasters.

While scholarship on the Jamaican diaspora has expanded to examine remittances (Minto-Coy, 2019; Mullings,2012), cultural identity (Plaza, 2006; Smith, 2025a; Trotz, 2006), and transnational political engagement (Meeks, 2011; Sives, 2012), their role in disaster relief and recovery remains underexplored. While research has documented the economic impacts of hurricanes in Jamaica (Spencer & Strobl, 2020), there is a paucity of research on how diaspora support contributes to post-disaster recovery. As climate-related disasters intensify, Jamaica's longstanding diaspora engagement reinforces their strategic role in mobilising resources, expertise, and transnational networks to strengthen recovery and resilience. This study examines how diaspora networks support hospitals and schools after major hurricanes, highlighting their potential to complement state efforts and strengthen community resilience. By situating diaspora engagement within broader socio-political and economic contexts, including governance inefficiencies and global migration dynamics, the paper addresses gaps in understanding transnational contributions to disaster recovery.

Jamaica has experienced destructive hurricanes, including Ivan (2004), Emily and Dennis (2005), Dean (2007), Nicole (2010), Sandy (2012), Beryl (2024), and Melissa (2025). Hurricane Ivan caused JMD 35.9 billion in damages (about 8% of GDP) (JIS, 2004), while Beryl resulted in losses equivalent to 1.1% of GDP (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2025). The recurring impact of these storms is reflected in the words of one individual who lamented, "poor Jamaica can't seem to catch a break" (Juicy Chef, 2010), and a senior citizen who described Hurricane Ivan as her personal "9/11" (as cited in Virtue, 2004). Across successive hurricanes, Jamaicans have similarly described feeling "neglected" (Gregory, 2010), "fearful" and "traumatised" (Hill, 2026), and "defenceless," "anxious," and "unprotected" (Ferguson, 2025), revealing a cumulative sense of vulnerability and insecurity. This shared experience was poignantly captured in a Jamaica Observer headline following Hurricane Ivan: "Truly, the rain falls on the just and the unjust" ("Truly, the Rain Falls," 2004). Buddan (2010) argues that repeated hurricane damage, weakened infrastructure, and institutional inefficiencies expose the limits of short-term recovery strategies. Holness concurs, emphasising that disaster preparedness is an existential imperative for Jamaica and, accordingly, requires greater financial and institutional resilience (as cited in Morris, 2023). Consequently, diaspora contributions represent a transnational resource that complements state capacity and multilateral assistance. Their sustained engagement in relief and recovery underscores the strategic role of non-state actors in

SIDS and the need to institutionalise diaspora engagement within climate adaptation and disaster risk governance.

By examining diaspora engagement through the intersecting lenses of climate change, disaster governance, and transnationalism, this study addresses a gap in Caribbean scholarship. It advances understanding of diasporas as strategic partners in post-disaster recovery and resilience, contributes to three overlapping fields, namely diaspora studies, disaster recovery, and climate change adaptation in SIDS. This study examines diaspora support beyond remittances through targeted post-disaster interventions and adds to the disaster recovery literature by incorporating the transnational dimension of aid flows, an aspect often overlooked in state-centric frameworks. This work engages policy debates on climate resilience in Jamaica, where diaspora resources represent an under-leveraged yet crucial component of national recovery capacity.

The following research questions guide the study.

1. What factors influence the diaspora's involvement in Jamaica's hurricane recovery efforts?
2. What narratives and frames are used to portray the diaspora's role in Jamaica's hurricane recovery efforts?
3. How does the Jamaican diaspora participate in hurricane recovery?
4. What challenges and sustainability considerations are evident in the diaspora's role in Jamaica's hurricane recovery?

This study highlights the value of structured diaspora partnerships in disaster planning, shifting from ad-hoc relief to sustained climate adaptation. It reinforces the need for policies that institutionalise diaspora engagement within disaster risk governance frameworks. By strengthening social work interventions, psychosocial support, and community-based recovery efforts, such partnerships can help address post-hurricane trauma, support community wellbeing, and respond to the long-term social impacts of climate-related disasters. Conceptually, it challenges state-centric views by framing diaspora engagement as transnational governance in which diasporans shape homeland resilience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diasporas are transnational communities that maintain social, economic, and political ties to their homelands while participating in host societies (Féron, 2020). Jamaica's population of nearly three million is matched by a diaspora of comparable size, concentrated in the United States, Britain, and Canada (Smith, 2025b). This diaspora is diverse, with varying interests, capacities, and levels of homeland involvement. Bound by shared identity and moral obligation, many diasporans extend their civic participation to Jamaica, forming an extension of the island's civic sphere (Smith, 2018). Diaspora civil society complements its domestic counterpart while drawing on greater resources, strategic positioning, and cosmopolitan reach. Recognising this civic capacity, Jamaica has emerged as a leader in the Anglophone Caribbean in diaspora affairs, developing targeted programmes and institutional mechanisms for formal engagement.

Remittances are among the most prominent forms of diasporic support. In 2024, Jamaica received over US$3 billion in remittances, accounting for about 20 percent of GDP (Bank of Jamaica, 2026). These flows supplement household incomes (McFarlane et al., 2025) and spike after

hurricanes and floods, enabling faster recovery than state support alone. The diaspora has become a pillar of resilience. However, heavy reliance on remittances highlights gaps in the social contract, where citizens depend on transnational support rather than reliable state protection (Gray, 2004). Beyond finances, diaspora organisations advocate for climate action and policy reform, addressing disaster preparedness, renewable energy, and equitable adaptation. While these efforts strengthen resilience, they reveal imbalanced outcomes, leaving households without strong diaspora ties at risk. Jamaica offers a compelling case for analysing diaspora support and engagement in disaster recovery. Its large diaspora, characterised by strong transnational ties, has played a critical role on many fronts, including post-hurricane relief and disaster response, highlighting the societal relevance of diaspora contributions.

Community development is central to disaster response, bringing together grassroots groups, professionals, advocates, and diaspora actors to build capacity, reduce long-term disruptions, and strengthen resilience (Boodram et al., 2024; Mathbor, 2007). In the Jamaican context, diaspora expertise and networks are forms of social capital, transforming financial lifelines into sustained community resilience (Mullings, 2012).

Jamaica has 1,010 public primary and secondary schools serving over 400,000 students daily and 2,431 early childhood institutions, many characterised by resource imbalances (Nichalls-Spencer & Roofe, 2023). The sector faces overlapping crises, including storm damage and the migration of skilled teachers. Malabver (2023) cautions that “Hurricane Teacher Migration” inhibits progress. Limited government funding exposes schools to chronic underinvestment and climate-related shocks. In response, diaspora-based Parent-Teacher Associations and alumni networks support infrastructure upgrades, and school programmes (Ellis & Thomas, 2019; Thompson, 2021). Williams observes that diaspora communities remain “connected to home by helping students” attending the schools they once attended (Williams, as cited in Angus, 2022). The health sector operates through 318 clinics and health centres and 24 public hospitals, alongside a physician density of 1.5 doctors per 1,000 people, below global recommendations (JIS, 2022). These vulnerabilities attest to the need to engage the diaspora as a partner in strengthening institutional capacity, particularly in disaster preparedness, recovery, and climate resilience efforts. Jamaica’s limited landmass, climate-sensitive economy, and exposure to extreme weather demand resilience frameworks that integrate local and diaspora communities.

Jamaica exemplifies the tensions between migration, development, and climate change, compounded by weak infrastructure, limited resources, and fragile governance. Shaped by postcolonial legacies and ongoing struggles over identity and belonging, the country highlights the uneven distribution of state resources and the disruptive effects of globalisation (Weis, 2005).

Diaspora contributions may supplement state resources through financial and material assistance, technical expertise, and social remittances, including ideas, knowledge, and practices transferred across borders (Levitt, 1998, 2001; Shain, 2007; Shivakoti, 2019). Such support is shaped by familial, cultural, and moral ties that sustain homeland connections and influence responses during crises (Fagen et al., 2009; Plaza, 2006; Mullings, 2011). Consistent with Anderson’s (1983) concept of the imagined community, shared identity can generate material support that connects external resources and expertise with domestic recovery needs. However, the

effectiveness of these contributions depends on their alignment with national policies and institutions rather than their use as substitutes for state capacity (de Haas, 2005).

Integrating diaspora support into national recovery requires a robust disaster-governance framework. The Jamaican Government coordinates disaster relief through the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), in collaboration with local authorities and international partners. However, bureaucratic delays, procurement difficulties, and coordination gaps constrain timely relief delivery, particularly in rural communities (Jones & Schoburgh, 2004; Thole et al., 2024). Reliance on foreign governments, international organisations, and external financing further reflects limited domestic response capacity (Clarke & Nelson, 2020). These constraints, shaped by neoliberal reform and postcolonial state capacity, limit the state's ability to finance and coordinate hurricane recovery, setting the stage for partnerships with the diaspora that supplement state-led relief efforts.

Diaspora partnerships are critical to addressing gaps in Jamaica's disaster governance, mobilising funds, supplies, networks, and local assistance beyond the state's immediate reach. Their effectiveness, however, hinges on trust, transparency, and credible oversight. When donors cannot trace how relief funds are received, allocated, and spent, confidence and future support may decline (Swedlund, 2017). Sustained diaspora–state collaboration therefore requires independent reporting, accessible public dashboards, clear delivery timelines, and real-time tracking of relief funds.

Disaster recovery is a collective endeavour sustained by transnational social networks. While family and community ties provide immediate support, diasporic communities mobilise remittances, humanitarian aid, expertise, and advocacy to strengthen state capacities constrained by fiscal, institutional, and infrastructural limitations (Adger et al., 2005; Peacock & Ragsdale, 1997; Unger & Powell, 1980). Moyo (2009) argues that foreign aid, rather than being inherently beneficial, can foster dependency, weaken governance, and hinder local economic development. This perspective offers a salient lens for understanding diaspora support, which often operates outside formal aid regimes and may function as a more flexible, community-embedded form of transnational development assistance.

Emotional, familial, and cultural ties spurred rapid US–Nepalese diaspora response after the 2015 earthquake, while distrust of Nepalese state agencies hindered aid coordination (Shivakoti, 2019). Arguably, diaspora engagement serves as a development resource. Governments that promote transparent communication, inclusive decision-making, and collaboration with diaspora communities can better harness transnational networks to strengthen institutions and resilience.

During Pakistan's 2022 floods, British charities and diaspora groups raised over £1 million. Additionally, "There's a significant diaspora community in the UK. They feel it because it's their country, it's their ancestors' country and they want to respond" (Kadodia, as cited in Khan, 2022). Across diverse contexts, diasporas have emerged as critical disaster responders. Haitian, Malayalee, Puerto Rican, and Jamaican diaspora communities mobilised funding, expertise, and relief following major disasters, accentuating the strength of transnational solidarity and the governance gaps that often necessitate their intervention (Esnard & Sapat, 2011; Taylor et al., 2023). These interventions represent a diasporic commitment to rebuilding home from afar.

By framing "home" as both a site of affective attachment and moral expectation (Hall, 1990), diasporas navigate obligations that often exceed local capacities. While their contributions are

transformative, reliance on diasporas raises questions about sustainability, accountability, and the limits of state responsibility. Diasporic and local communities are therefore crucial partners, bringing financial resources, expertise, and rapid support that complement institutional efforts. Social workers are likewise imperative to supporting the well-being of individuals, families, and communities as they navigate and recover from the intertwined losses associated with hurricanes and emigration, while recognising the potential of diaspora networks as partners in psychosocial support, community recovery, and resilience-building that extend beyond the capacities of individuals and formal institutions alone (Hayward & Joseph, 2018). Practices of "Holding Up Yaad," rooted in shared values, belonging, and collective responsibility, encapsulate how diaspora networks carve out alternative spaces of care and support that complement formal welfare and recovery systems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretically, this study integrates resilience theory and transnationalism through the culturally grounded concept of Holding Up Yaad. Yaad is understood as a physical territory and a frame of identity, memory, kinship, and belonging (Smith, 2025b). This interpretation reflects Jamaican traditions of mutual support, where households and communities mobilise kinship ties, pooled resources, and collective rebuilding before formal assistance arrives (Beckford & Campbell, 2013). Diasporic hurricane responses are not charity. Instead, they are cross-border practices of care through which Jamaicans abroad affirm belonging and responsibility to Yaad. Fundamentally, they are symbolic acts that produce narratives of responsibility, resilience, and belonging.

Resilience is the capacity of individuals, communities, and systems to absorb shocks, adapt, and recover from disruption (Manyena, 2006). This definition emphasises resilience as a dynamic social process rather than a fixed attribute or technical outcome. In disaster-prone contexts such as Jamaica, resilience is enacted through everyday practices of coping, mutual support, and collective problem-solving. Here, resilience is aspirational and experiential, shaped by repeated exposure to hurricanes and by uneven recovery processes that leave households and communities reliant on informal support networks. Resilience theory alone cannot account for how these strategies are culturally motivated, morally framed and sustained across national borders. For this reason, resilience is interpreted through the culturally embedded notion of Holding Up Yaad.

The study advances Holding Up Yaad as the underlying framework through which diasporic action is understood, foregrounding Jamaican cultural meanings, moral obligations, and identity-based motivations that shape diaspora contributions to hurricane relief. Hall's (1990) insistence that identity is "a matter of becoming as well as being" offers a foundation for understanding diasporic Jamaican engagement in hurricane recovery as an ongoing act of identity-making rather than a residual attachment to homeland. Holding Up Yaad exemplifies the kind of diasporic practice Hall (1990) describes.

Hall's (1990, 1997) work is insightful because it rejects romanticised notions of diaspora as a unified/static community. Instead, it emphasises fragmentation, hybridity, and internal difference, features that are central to understanding the uneven capacities, motivations, and forms of participation within the Jamaican diaspora (Hall, 1990, 1997). Holding Up Yaad operates within these differentiated diasporic realities, where class, migration status, geographic location, and access to

resources shape who can “hold up” the homeland, and in what particular ways. Chevannes (2001) characterises Jamaican cultural expressions, including kinship practices, spirituality, and social rituals, as symbolic anchors that allow diasporans to maintain connections to the homeland across distance. Holding Up Yaad operates as one such anchor, translating emotional attachment and cultural memory into material and organisational forms of support. Hurricane relief is an extension of culturally embedded practices of reciprocity, care, and collective survival. This view resonates with Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the “third space,” where diasporic identities are negotiated between homeland and host society. Holding Up Yaad emerges within this liminal space, shaped by both Jamaican cultural expectations and the opportunities and constraints of life abroad. Diasporic Jamaicans mobilise resources from host societies while remaining symbolically embedded in local recovery processes. Hurricane recovery thus becomes a transnational practice infused with cultural meaning, situated between distance and belonging. Within this interpretive frame, resilience theory explains why Holding Up Yaad becomes consequential in Jamaica’s post-hurricane context. Repeated reliance on community and diasporic resilience may obscure how colonial legacies, debt, austerity, and underinvestment shape exposure to hurricanes and disparities in post-disaster recovery.

Transnationalism emphasises enduring social fields that connect migrants to their homelands through economic, social, and emotional ties (Basch et al., 1994; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). These social fields enable diasporic Jamaicans to mobilise resources through family networks, faith-based organisations, hometown associations, and professional groups, often responding more rapidly and flexibly than formal aid mechanisms (see Levitt, 1998). Diasporic interventions circulate both material and symbolic resources, reinforcing resilience while reshaping social relations and power dynamics. Holding Up Yaad mediates resilience and transnational practices in shaping diaspora contributions to hurricane recovery. This framework informs the study’s research questions and empirical analysis. It moves beyond celebratory accounts of diaspora generosity towards a critical understanding of diaspora-supported hurricane recovery as culturally motivated, structurally constrained, and politically consequential within Jamaica’s broader climate vulnerability and development landscape.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study employs a qualitative thematic content analysis of media and official documents. The analysis covers January 1, 2004, to December 31, 2025, encompassing eight major hurricanes (Ivan, Dennis, Emily, Dean, Nicole, Sandy, Beryl, and Melissa). This approach enables a longitudinal assessment of the evolving relationship between the Jamaican diaspora and the state across successive disasters, increasing climate vulnerability, and expanding transnational ties, while capturing sustained public and policy attention to diaspora engagement. The dataset comprises 198 publicly accessible documents from three source categories to capture public, institutional, and policy perspectives through analytical triangulation. Newspaper reports account for 145 documents (73.2%) drawn from the *Gleaner* and the *Observer*, selected due to their prominence in Jamaica's media landscape. Media coverage also provides insight into how diaspora contributions are narrated, legitimised, and debated within Jamaican society, making these sources appropriate for examining societal recognition of transnational support. Official releases from the MFAFT (16 documents, 8.1%)

and the JIS (37 documents, 18.7%) were publicly available on their websites. Documents were selected for relevance to diaspora engagement, hurricane recovery, and related policy priorities.

Coding and Analysis Procedures

Keyword searches using terms “diaspora aid,” “hurricane recovery,” and “post-disaster support” were conducted and supplemented by manual browsing of archive sections and institutional webpages to minimise the risk of omission. Documents were included if they explicitly referred to hurricanes affecting Jamaica and mentioned diaspora involvement in relief, recovery, and/or rebuilding efforts.

Coding proceeded iteratively in several stages. All documents were read in full to establish familiarity with content, context, and recurring narratives, with analytic memos maintained to document emerging patterns. Open coding was conducted inductively, assigning descriptive codes to discrete text segments representing meaningful units of analysis. For example, references to remittances/fundraising were coded as “Financial Support,” while references to bureaucratic delays/resource constraints were coded as “Institutional Gaps.” In the axial coding phase, relationships among initial codes were examined, and related codes were grouped into broader analytical categories. Codes capturing different forms of diaspora engagement were organised into higher-order categories reflecting modes of contribution, while codes relating to state responses were clustered around recognition, coordination, and constraint. Coding decisions were revisited and refined as additional documents were analysed to maintain analytical coherence and grounding in the data.

FINDINGS

This section reports the empirical data generated through content analysis of communications from the MFAFT (n=16), JIS(n=37), and two national newspapers (n=145).

RQ1: What factors influence the diaspora’s involvement in Jamaica’s hurricane recovery efforts?

Diaspora engagement in Jamaica’s hurricane recovery is shaped by emotional attachment, cultural identity, and a sense of personal and collective responsibility. Media reports consistently depict Jamaicans abroad as deeply connected to the homeland through ancestry, heritage, and love for the country. A narrative illustrates this symbolic and cultural connection: “We are joined by the spirit of the land we call the ‘Rock’. We are bound by the country of our heritage, where ours or our ancestors’ umbilical cords, our navel strings, are buried… we are bound by the love we share for Jamaica.” (Gleaner, 23.5. 2024). A related article captured this connection:

> Most Jamaicans living overseas walk around with a piece of the
> homeland in their hearts … diaspora engagement is not to be scoffed at …
> Jamaicans in the diaspora are no doubt motivated by their love of the country,
> and they could become a key engine of growth in a sluggish, International Monetary
> Fund-dominated economy. (Gleaner, 22.6. 2013)

Another article noted, “Most members of the Diaspora are patriotic Jamaicans whose connections to the country of their birth or heritage transcend political party affiliation in their support of Jamaica” (Observer, 1.3. 2023). Such representations position diaspora engagement as an expression of

enduring ties, highlighting the role of identity and belonging in motivating action. Patriotism and loyalty also feature prominently.

Crises reveal the depth and consistency of the diaspora's commitment to Jamaica, underscoring that engagement is both emotionally and culturally motivated. Some reports indicated that diaspora members respond rapidly and collectively during times of need. A typical sentiment was that "as they have always done during the island's darkest hours, scores of patriotic Jamaicans across the United States are responding to Hurricane Beryl's devastating passage with a massive relief effort" (Observer, 7.7.2024). A diaspora advisory board representative confirmed that "In less than three weeks the Jamaican community has mobilised and have taken the appeal to heart. Individuals, businesses, community organizations, and churches have all responded very positively…" (JIS, 24.11.2004). These examples reinforce how deep-seated emotional attachment, shared identity, and civic responsibility drive diaspora involvement, translating into tangible support that is timely, coordinated, and sustained across multiple sectors.

Making donations after Hurricane Beryl, a lawyer explained, "Jamaica is always home and I was simply heartbroken to see parts of St Elizabeth like Black River, where I grew up, and Treasure Beach, Flagaman and Pedro Plains where our beloved grandmother grew up, so battered by the hurricane" (Observer, 5.08.2024).

A government senator underlined the diaspora's commitment to national development. He said,

> Our Diaspora is passionate about and love our country. I thank them for their significant contributions through charities and directly to the agricultural, education and health sectors and community development initiatives…the Diaspora represents a reservoir of social and financial capital which must be optimized for national development. (Observer, 25.6.2021)

A member of the Jamaica Middle East Diaspora explained: "All of us have a common goal, which is love for our country, and we want to give back……We are passionate and we are ready to support…we want to see things go well" (JIS, 26.07.2017). These statements reflects both collective consciousness and collective responsibility, where some diasporans perceive themselves as accountable for contributing to the well-being of communities at home.

The diaspora's involvement in Jamaica's hurricane recovery efforts is also linked to perceived gaps in government leadership. Several commentators bemoaned the Jamaican government's underperformance. They attributed this to why diasporans are compelled to act:

> Governments have the responsibility to inspire hope…The fact that the Government hasn't succeeded in this area means that it is up to us, we the people…No matter how far we may go, there is only one place we can say is ours and so let us invest in it and make it better. (Gleaner, 5.2. 2023)

Diaspora contributions were described as stabilising the national economy, with reports noting that members abroad were "flushed with cash" (Observer, 28.1.2023) and help "keep the local economy afloat" (Observer, 25.2.2023). Between April -October 2023, diaspora donations to the health sector reached J$93.8 million, including J$4.3 million allocated to the Adopt-A-Clinic Programme from only three diaspora locations, while education contributions totalled US$24.6 million in 2019/2020 alone (JIS, 18.3. 2024). These findings suggest that diaspora involvement is driven by identity, patriotism,

and material capacity, alongside a desire to respond where government action is perceived as insufficient.

RQ2: How is the diaspora's role publicly and institutionally framed?

Newspaper and official discourse frequently frame the diaspora as a strategic national partner, integral to development, economic growth, and the nation's cultural identity. It was observed that:

> The diaspora is an essential part of Jamaica's economy, identity, history, and cultural fabric. I urge the government to continue to build a strong and vibrant relationship with the diaspora that is mutually beneficial to those residing overseas and at home (Gleaner, 12.9. 2020).

Descriptions of the diaspora as "faithful and true" and as part of a "nation without borders" position members as vital to Jamaica's development (Gleaner, 24.06.2024). Several members of the diaspora remain deeply connected to the nation and continue to contribute to its economy, culture, and sense of identity, highlighting the importance of strengthening diaspora engagement to foster sustained collaboration and mutual development.

The diaspora is also publicly framed through the prism of loyalty and enduring attachment to Jamaica. This is encapsulated in the following statement: "They are grateful for the opportunity that living in another country has afforded them … but they never forget the rock from which they have been hewn or the ground from which they have been dug" (Observer, 24.4.2024). Remittances and donations are underpinned by the need to support families, communities, and national development in Jamaica (Observer, 6.12.2011). Official narratives reinforce this framing. For instance, in light of institutional framing, MFAFT communications described assistance as: "the generous offers of assistance as the island recovers from the impact of Hurricane Beryl" (MFAFT, 9.7. 2024).

It was reported that "Jamaica is fortunate to have enjoyed excellent partnerships" with the diaspora in post-hurricane recovery efforts (MFAFT, 9.07. 2024). A Banker maintained that "If Jamaica is to prosper and realise our full potential as a nation, we will need the full involvement of our diaspora in the economic, social and cultural life of Jamaica" (JIS, 2.04.2024). Characterising the diaspora as a long-term development partner, Jamaica-diaspora relations were described as being at an "unprecedented stage of engagement" marked by a "strategic and symbiotic relationship" (JIS, 8.01.2024). The "symbiotic partnership" between the diaspora and the government was frequently mentioned (Gleaner, 6.04.2017; JIS, 8.01.2024; MFAFT, 25.06.2019). Such framing positions diaspora actors as legitimate partners in national development. Counter-narratives, however, reveal tensions. While diasporans are often represented as patriotic and emotionally attached to Jamaica, some accounts reveal a sense of frustration and conditional recognition. The statement that "many persons in the Jamaican overseas community are of the view that they are remembered only when there is a crisis in the country and the country is in need of assistance" (Gleaner, 13.06.2004) highlights that diaspora engagement is sometimes perceived as reactive rather than sustained. A pastor criticised diaspora involvement as politically or culturally compromised:

> A lot of diaspora members have sided with the imperialists to put down their country, belittle their countrymen, and for a mess of First-World pottage, they have become part and parcel

> of the Euro-American war against Jamaicans and the rest of black humanity. (Observer, 3.06.2011)

The competing perspectives above highlight that diaspora representation is simultaneously celebratory and contested, revealing political and cultural complexities surrounding transnational engagement.

RQ3: How does the Jamaican diaspora participate in hurricane recovery?

Diaspora participation is diverse and multi-sectoral, encompassing financial support, education, infrastructure, health, and logistics coordination. A politician emphasised some ways the diaspora participates in hurricane recovery, “Our diaspora has made significant contributions to the development of Jamaica via aid, health missions, sponsoring education programmes, and paving the way for opportunities in sports, among other endeavours.” (Gleaner, 17.8. 2022). In a back-to-school fair in which several schools in St. Elizabeth were destroyed after hurricane Beryl, a local beneficiary of diaspora contributions said: “They didn’t have to do it, but they are doing it out of the kindness of their hearts” (JIS, 17.08.2024). This narrative reveals the tangible impact of diaspora support on local communities, reinforcing the idea that such contributions provide not only material assistance but also emotional encouragement and a sense of solidarity during times of crisis.

Based on the sampled articles (N=198), financial contributions were the most frequently referenced form of support (70%), followed by education initiatives (60%), infrastructure recovery (50%), health and welfare programmes (45%), and logistics coordination (40%). This distribution suggests that diaspora actors contribute not only through monetary transfers but also through institutional partnerships, community initiatives, and sector-specific development projects, reflecting the layered nature of transnational support.

Education-focused support was particularly prominent. For example, following Hurricane Beryl, the Lorraine J. Smith Foundation donated $1 million to assist families and prepare students for the school year. Here, “Several of the hardest hit families have received much-needed assistance from Jamaican organisations in the United States to prepare their children for the upcoming school year” (JIS, 17.8. 2024). Some diasporans also organised back-to-school fairs in St Elizabeth and Cross Keys, providing school supplies, health services, and medical checkups. One organiser explained: “So, now you see the parents and the children are out here to collect these backpacks with school supplies, to get their medical checkup at no cost because this is what we do as diaspora members” (JIS, 17.08.2024).

Education emerges as a central focus in the sample, with diasporans acknowledging the value of local institutions to their success. Giving back is framed as a duty informed by experience. Reflecting this perspective, one diaspora member noted:

> I grew up here, and the preparation for the education I received in
> the United States did not start in the USA. It began at Woodlands
> Primary, and I know the value of the system we have in Jamaica despite
> all its problems. And that has inspired my giving back. (Gleaner, 2.09. 2024)

With contributions from its diaspora alumni association, a senior teacher at Munro College noted, “This will add to what we would have gotten from the Ministry of Education…to tighten up some areas where the ministry would not have been able to assist, like the dormitory and the

auditorium… and staff housing" (Observer, 8.09.2024). The statement also highlights the broader reliance on partnerships between local institutions and external actors to restore infrastructure and maintain educational continuity after natural disasters. Government officials have also highlighted the importance of partnerships. The chairman of a health board of management opined: "Corporate and Diaspora support is very important as, unfortunately, Government alone cannot do it, and the best model is this kind of partnership and partnership with the community" (Gleaner, 28.07.2017).

Diaspora interventions complement state efforts by filling gaps in infrastructure and services, as seen at Hampton School and Munro College, where relief supplies from the JAHJAH Foundation and its partners supported repairs to dormitories, auditoriums, and staff housing, enabling students to return to classrooms (Observer, 8.09. 2024). The case of Manning's School underscores the dual reality of Jamaica's hurricane recovery, mirrored in chronic neglect of infrastructure on the one hand, and diaspora intervention on the other. Alumni in New York donated US$5,000, with pledges from South Florida and Toronto chapters, to refurbish the school, post-hurricane Beryl (Gleaner, 23.03.2025).

Initiatives such as 'Adopt-a-Clinic' integrate diaspora philanthropy into national health services, a government minister noted: "The Adopt-A-Clinic Programme has been one of the driving forces that enable individuals and groups to contribute to the improvement of healthcare service delivery at the primary-care level" (JIS, 13.10.2023). Diaspora networks also coordinate logistics, fundraising, and the distribution of supplies for immediate disaster relief, often collaborating with Jamaican consulates and local NGOs. For example, over 8,000 pounds of relief supplies were sent to ODPEM following Hurricane Dean, mobilised by diaspora leaders and former military officers (JIS, 23.09.2007). In the UK, US, and Canada, diaspora groups launched targeted fundraising drives, including toy donations and hurricane relief funds (JIS, 24.11.2004; 20.08.2007). Jamaica diaspora participation in hurricane recovery is comprehensive and organised, combining immediate humanitarian assistance with long-term developmental contributions.

RQ4: What challenges and sustainability considerations shape diaspora engagement?

Diaspora involvement in Jamaica's post-hurricane recovery efforts is influenced by structural, environmental, and political challenges. Overpopulated schools, for example, highlight ongoing resource constraints. Some "Sixty-five of Jamaica's 173 high schools are overpopulated, raising concerns about teaching quality, learning conditions, and resource availability in institutions accommodating more students than their designed capacity" (Gleaner, 8. 12. 2024). Addressing diasporans, an academic emphasised the urgency of climate action: "The response to climate change is everybody's business" (Gleaner, 1.07.2022). The statement frames disaster recovery and resilience as collective obligations that extend beyond the immediate geographic boundaries of Jamaica. It also situates diaspora contributions within a long-term sustainability perspective.

Political frustrations and governance gaps influence perceptions of diaspora engagement in Jamaica's hurricane recovery. Some diaspora members expressed concern that government initiatives are politicised, unresponsive, /disconnected from the realities on the ground. One individual observed, "In speaking broadly with members of the Diaspora, I find, overwhelmingly, they believe the Government is arrogant…" (Observer, 1.3.2023), while another stressed the need for meaningful government action: "Our politicians must pay attention by engaging the people with real

solutions to Jamaica's problems" (Gleaner, 4.9. 2020). Similarly, a diasporan highlighted the broader implications for Jamaica's reputation and the potential for collective action:

> We believe that Brand Jamaica is being hurt by the fact that our leaders are not doing what they are supposed to be doing…we as a diaspora, we as a people, both at home and abroad, can come together for the benefit of Jamaica…we are all Jamaicans and, together, we can work it out, but the Government need to be responsible and say we can help in building Jamaica just like we can help in anything else (Gleaner, 15.1. 2024).

Beyond political frustrations, sustainability concerns arise around the risk of over-reliance on diaspora contributions and the need for proactive engagement in disaster preparedness. A report noted that diaspora actors should "be more active in the nation's disaster preparedness programmes" (JIS, 16.06.2005), emphasising the importance of strategic involvement rather than reactive aid. The government has acknowledged these challenges, with the Prime Minister affirming, "We are committed to formalising and strengthening these partnerships, embedding them into our national disaster risk governance framework for the long term" (JIS, 17.7. 2025). While diaspora contributions remain indispensable, these narratives underscore the ongoing need to address issues of coordination, governance, and long-term resilience to ensure that transnational support complements sustainable recovery strategies

The findings of this present study indicate that diaspora engagement in Jamaica's hurricane recovery is driven by a combination of identity, emotional attachment, and civic responsibility, with diaspora members often stepping in to address gaps left by government action. Media and official communications frame the diaspora as a valued partner in development, although competing narratives reveal tensions around loyalty, political alignment, and the purpose of engagement. Participation is multi-sectoral and complementary, encompassing financial contributions, education, health, infrastructure, and logistics, reflecting both material and institutional support. Sustainability challenges, including governance issues, climate change impacts, and structural limitations, highlight the importance of embedding diaspora involvement within formal disaster preparedness and recovery frameworks. The Jamaican diaspora assumes an integral part of the national community, actively contributing to recovery efforts while navigating complex social, political, and environmental realities.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the Jamaican diaspora operates as a strategic partner, providing financial resources, technical expertise, and rapid-response capacity that reinforce community resilience and recovery over time. These findings support previous research showing that diasporas, motivated by emotional attachment and moral obligation, serve as first responders during crises (Levitt, 2001; Shivakoti, 2019).

The Jamaican diaspora remains under-integrated in national climate policy, despite its central role in disaster recovery. The contributions of its members are informed by emotional and cultural ties to Yaad, reflecting a sustained sense of responsibility and attachment to the homeland. While diasporic involvement bolsters disaster recovery and development, high levels of emigration can

simultaneously deplete local human capital, weaken institutional capacity, and limit the efficacy of domestic governance structures tasked with climate adaptation and disaster preparedness. These dynamics underscore the importance of strategically integrating diaspora contributions into national policy frameworks, ensuring that transnational support complements domestic capacity.

Across multiple hurricanes, diaspora contributions were framed as both practical and symbolic, reflecting ties to "Yaad" while addressing gaps left by constrained state capacity. Consistent with studies of the Nepalese (Shivakoti, 2019), Haitian (Esnard & Sapat, 2011), and Malayalee diasporas (Taylor et al., 2023), Jamaican diaspora actors supplement local recovery efforts by mobilising resources and coordination where state capacity is limited. This reinforces Unger and Powell's (1980) and Peacock and Ragsdale's (1997) arguments that diaspora networks amplify local social support systems, while also illustrating the paradox highlighted in Hall (1990) and Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc (1994). Without migration, Jamaica would retain local skills, but it would lose the transnational ties and resources that diasporic communities provide for recovery and resilience. This study suggests that hurricanes, emigration, and climate vulnerability are intertwined, producing a scenario in which diaspora engagement is both necessary and transformative.

The impact of hurricanes on Jamaica's infrastructure, combined with the diaspora's steadfast commitment to rebuilding efforts, cannot be overlooked. This raises persistent questions about development, climate change response, and the actors involved in disaster recovery. The diaspora's role in hurricane recovery reflects a shared commitment to "Holding Up Yaad," rooted in Jamaican national identity. Their support for schools, hospitals, and community projects is emblematic of the resilience of Jamaican identity and demonstrates how post-colonial legacies, community engagement, and transnational ties shape disaster recovery and nation-building.

The findings highlight the importance of diaspora-supported psychosocial interventions, resource mobilisation, and community-based recovery in addressing post-hurricane trauma and supporting community wellbeing. For social workers, the findings also underscore the need to engage diasporic actors as partners in recovery and resilience-building initiatives, while for social policymakers it points to the value of institutionalising diaspora participation within disaster risk governance and social protection frameworks. The study advances understanding of how migration and transnational ties shape social welfare outcomes in climate-vulnerable Caribbean societies.

The intensity of hurricanes in Jamaica highlights the need to embed resilience into infrastructure, planning, and public policy. While the state remains central to disaster preparedness, the diaspora needs to be leveraged as a vital resource, particularly against the background of declining aid from traditional development partners, which constrains domestic capacity and reduce predictable external support. Diaspora actors offer indigenous knowledge, sector-specific expertise, and investor insight attuned to local social, economic, and cultural realities, enabling interventions that are both contextually appropriate and strategically targeted. This embedded understanding allows diaspora initiatives to identify gaps, address urgent community needs, and sustain development projects in ways that external/short-term actors often cannot. Jamaica has an opportunity to strengthen diaspora engagement as a strategic asset, supporting both climate adaptation and development in an era of environmental volatility and shifting global aid dynamics.

The framing of diaspora engagement as a form of transnational recovery infrastructure is particularly compelling, positioning diasporic networks as integral components of Jamaica's disaster resilience ecosystem. This perspective challenges conventional notions of disaster recovery as a purely domestic responsibility, exemplifying how transnational ties enhance social, economic, and institutional capacities.

Diaspora engagement serves as a transnational resource that complements state capacity by providing targeted financial and technical support and strengthening community-based initiatives. However, consistent with Moyo (2009), uncoordinated reliance on diaspora contributions can mask governance weaknesses and produce uneven outcomes if not integrated into formal disaster recovery and resilience frameworks. The findings suggest that effective diaspora engagement depends on trust, institutional responsiveness, and accountable governance (Adger et al., 2005; Shivakoti, 2019). For Jamaica, diaspora participation is part of a wider social imperative that includes adaptation and preparedness. Over-dependence on external actors may inadvertently obscure structural weaknesses in public infrastructure and disaster governance, echoing Esnard and Sapat's (2011) argument that transformative impact requires institutional alignment. This study also underscores the role of identity, belonging, and emotional attachment in motivating diaspora action (Anderson,1983; Hall,1990). These findings highlight that transnational identity is inseparable from practical contributions, reinforcing the notion that diaspora participation is both affective and instrumental. By linking cultural attachment to concrete actions, this study expands the Caribbean studies and diasporic literature by showing how diaspora engagement in Jamaica simultaneously operates at the emotional, social, and structural levels, a nuance less emphasised in previous research.

The study highlights a tension between immediate relief and long-term development. Diaspora support addresses critical gaps in schools, hospitals, and local infrastructure. However, systemic improvements depend on effective state planning, resilient institutions, and coordinated climate adaptation. This affirms the importance of viewing diaspora support as complementary rather than substitutive (Levitt, 2001; Plaza, 2006).

The Jamaican diaspora is a strategically valuable and culturally embedded partner in disaster recovery, whose engagement is shaped by emotional attachment, civic responsibility, and social capital. The study corroborates prior literature on transnationalism (Levitt, 1998), resilience (Joseph, 2013), and diaspora engagement (Smith, 2018,2023) while adding new insights into sectoral patterns, governance challenges, and climate adaptation implications in the Caribbean context. Conceptually, it situates diaspora contributions within the Holding Up Yaad framework, highlighting how affiliation, belonging, and moral obligation drive sustained engagement. Holistic recovery requires integrating diaspora engagement into formal disaster planning, strengthening institutional capacity, and linking immediate relief with long-term development.

Limitations

Despite the insights provided by this study of diaspora contributions to Jamaica's hurricane recovery, there are limitations. The analysis relies on newspapers and government reports, which may reflect institutional biases. Only eight major hurricanes between 2004 and 2025 were examined, potentially overlooking other events that elicited diaspora support. Findings are specific to Jamaica and not generalisable to other Caribbean/diasporic contexts. Future research could incorporate

interviews with diasporans for firsthand perspectives on their motivations for supporting hurricane recovery.

CONCLUSION

Diaspora interventions in Jamaica's hurricane recovery reflect a struggle with structural constraints and contestation over responsibility for citizen welfare. They reveal tensions between neoliberal policies that limit public spending and the state's (in)capacity to fully meet citizens' needs amid climate-induced disasters. These interventions highlight the necessity of partnerships between governments and non-state actors, including diaspora networks, to address vulnerabilities that no single actor can manage. Diaspora support provides relief, funding, technical assistance, and sector-specific initiatives, bolstering recovery and development. However, it cannot fully substitute for long-term public policy, resilient infrastructure, and institutional planning.

Diaspora participation transforms crisis response into a networked, cross-border endeavour, linking local needs to global resources and demonstrating how social cohesion, transnational attachment, and strategic intervention collectively bolster Jamaica's adaptive resilience to climate-related disasters. Positioning diaspora contributions within the broader frameworks of sustainability and disaster response in Jamaica enables a critical rethinking of the country's climate adaptation strategies. Rather than viewing remittances, donations, and community mobilisation as episodic, ad hoc humanitarian responses, this study recasts diaspora support as a strategic climate partnership. The reframing embraces the diaspora as a key stakeholder in Jamaica's development trajectory, capable of complementing state-led adaptation initiatives and shaping policy outcomes. This perspective challenges the conventional donor-recipient dichotomy and foregrounds the agency of diasporans in shaping climate resilience at home.

This study contributes to International Relations (IR) and social work scholarship by highlighting how diasporic practices of care, consciousness, obligation, and identity operate across borders, producing innovative forms of solidarity that are vital to the future of human and social development in Jamaica's climate-vulnerable context. It also contributes to social work and social policy debates by showcasing how transnational family networks and diaspora engagement function as informal welfare mechanisms in times of crisis. Considering recommendations, Jamaica should explore alternative financing mechanisms, such as climate bonds and regional insurance pools, to secure predictable resources for disaster risk management.

The lived experiences of Jamaicans, at Yaad and in the diaspora, highlight the ways communities organically respond to recurring climate hazards. Local households, churches, and grassroots organisations often become the first responders, creating adaptive mechanisms that are shaped by intimate knowledge of place, social networks, and cultural practices. These forms of organic community development illustrate that resilience is not solely a top-down process imposed by the state or international agencies. Rather, it emerges from the everyday actions of individuals and groups navigating uncertainty, loss, and recovery. Lived experience provides insights into how social cohesion, reciprocity, and shared cultural memory serve as informal but effective mechanisms of disaster mitigation. In the storms that batter Yaad, diaspora hands reach across oceans, holding the nation up while challenging it to rethink how governance, community, and resilience intersect.

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APPENDIX

Coded Media Sources Cited in the Findings

Citation used in text	Full source
Gleaner, 23.05.2024	Ward, C. A. (2024, May 23). No bastard citizens of Jamaica at home and abroad. The Gleaner. https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20240523/ambassador-curtis-ward-no-bastard-citizens-jamaica-home-and-abroad
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