

**Date**

Sept 12-13 1988

**Location**

Nationwide, especially the eastern and coastal western parts

**No. Dead**

49

**No. Affected**

810,000 homeless

**Damage**

Damage to infrastructure, crops, and utility services reached an estimated \$1 000.000 000

**The Disaster**

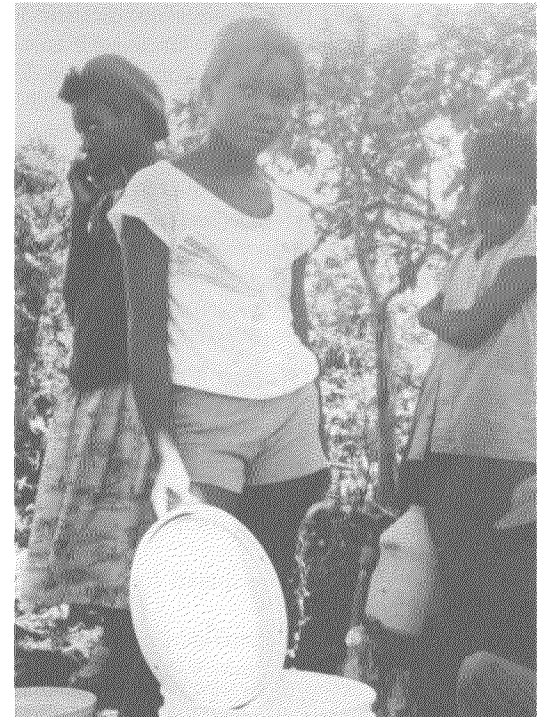
Hurricane Gilbert left trails of destruction throughout the Caribbean. Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and other countries sustained heavy blows. But, Gilbert particularly devastated Jamaica, killing 49 people, leaving 810,000 homeless, and causing an estimated \$1 billion in damage to infrastructure and economy.

Gilbert first entered the Caribbean as a tropical depression on Friday, Sept. 9. By the time it struck Jamaica after passing over the islands of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola, the storm was packing gusts of up to 224 km per hour (140 mph). The hurricane's center swept across the island in an east-west direction with four hours of battering winds on Sept 12 followed by 254 mm (10 inches) of torrential rains on Sept 13. As skies cleared on Sept. 14, floodwater from the downpour began to drain and residents preliminarily assessed damage.

Because the eye traveled across the island's midsection, the areas east and west of the hurricane's path felt the brunt of activity. Aerial surveys revealed great devastation in eastern Portland Parish from Long Bay south and St. Thomas Parish from the easternmost tip to Eleven Mile. This area contains 5% to 7% of Jamaica's population. Gilbert flattened banana, coconut, and sugar crops, destroyed most housing, and took off the roof and top floor of the regional hospital. Although roads remained open, the main highway from the area to Kingston was closed.

In the west, substantial destruction stretched from the Black River to Montego Bay. The region's airport was temporarily closed. Assessments showed that the majority of houses, some schools, and tree crops received severe damage from Lucea to Green Island in Western Hanover Parish. The sugar-growing area in Westmoreland Parish from Negril east to Bluefields was also affected. Hotels that cater to Jamaica's significant tourist population in Negril and Montego Bay suffered moderate roof and water damage. Montego Bay was without water or electricity for at least a week.

In comparison to either end of the island, central Jamaica emerged from Gilbert relatively unscathed. In Kingston, the capital city of 750,000 residents, trees, zinc roofs, utility poles, and billboards littered streets that resembled rivers more than roadways. Bits and pieces of aircraft lay strewn about at the temporarily-closed Norman Manley Airport. The shantytowns, public facilities, and warehouses revealed what structural destruction had occurred. Food and water remained in short supply immediately following Gilbert, with



**Young victims wait for the water delivery trucks.**

*Photos by LeVonne Harrell, OFDA*

residents in the rural fringes of Kingston more than a mile's walk to the nearest source of water. Fallen trees and limbs had knocked down utility poles, cutting off electricity and most telephone service. The public distribution networks, especially in areas with many trees, suffered more damage than the transmission system. Private generators were able to supply some temporary power until the main power lines could be repaired.