



PRESS STATEMENT

ON

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH PROJECTS

BY

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**Ministry of Health and Wellness
Training Room
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8:30a.m.**

Good Morning,

In an effort to coordinate the Caribbean Region's response to climate change, the “**Developing a Climate Resilient Health System in The Bahamas**” project was developed. This project is designed to improve the climate resilience of the health systems in countries.

The Developing a Climate Resilient Health System in The Bahamas project is a team effort between –

- the Government of The Bahamas; and
- the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (5Cs).

The organisations in The Bahamas identified to execute the projects are the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources. This duet of Ministries form the National Designated Authority (NDA). The Green Climate Fund is a primary source of funding for this project.

As is common knowledge, and despite of challenges more recently with responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Bahamas is still

recovering from the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian which landed on our shores as a category 5 hurricane on 1st September 2019. This terrible hurricane caused flooding and unprecedented destruction in Abaco and Grand Bahama. This was our worst climate-related experience yet.

Later in March, 2020, the COVID-19 virus was diagnosed in country. This pandemic laid bare a number of deficiencies in the health system infrastructure – both from a technological and physical standpoint. It threatened our ability to continue to deliver routine health services to the Bahamian public.

With the persisting waves of the pandemic, The Bahamas, like many of our sister Caribbean countries found ourselves having to prepare and mitigate against a potential hurricane landfall amid a COVID-19 pandemic. As we revised our response patterns, guidelines for shelters and other policies several truths were evident. There are–

- the urgent need to strengthen linkages; and

- the need to build human, technical, physical and policy capacity that will address climate change and health issues in The Bahamas.

An early assessment identifies deficits in the following areas:

- 1) climate change and health policy,
- 2) climate change technical expertise
- 3) health workforce,
- 4) community/civil society engagement,
- 5) climate-resilient health infrastructure,
- 6) data collection, information & technology, and
- 7) financing for climate change and health issues.

This partnership, the work of the NDA is created to work toward strengthening our capacity to strategically respond to and close the aforementioned gaps.

Specifically, this particular effort of enhancing climate resiliency through the Developing a Climate Resilient Health System Project in The

Bahamas will assist The Bahamas to strengthen our national organizations with human resources and technical knowledge to prepare, coordinate and respond to climate change and health matters.

The project calls for two main actions.

The first action is to explore what is meant by and how the Bahamas will incorporate the idea of “climate SMART health” through the creation of policies and systems that promote climate-resilient health care.

The second action is to enhance the effectiveness and alignment of surveillance systems that provide information on matters that impact the public’s health. This includes strengthening communication mechanisms, across governmental, private and civil society agencies and building human capacity, and improving on technical and physical infrastructures to collectively and efficiently mitigate and respond to climate change effects.

For a national health and environmental surveillance system to improve, there needs to be an assessment of existing systems against the ideal to identify the gaps. It is anticipated that during this exercise there will be a shift from paper-based systems to an electronic-based systems that will improve the accuracy and efficiency of communications, data analysis and responsiveness. It is further anticipated that this system, once implemented will require significant human and technological capital. Furthermore, it is recognized that first responders to climate disasters with health implications include healthcare professionals, environmental and health surveillance officers and members of civil society.

A national health and environmental surveillance system will permit the Government to not only track climate-change-related illnesses, but also predict and mitigate against patterns of health challenges associated with changes in the climate and physical environment. A Surveillance system will also facilitate the focused delivery of assistance and protective

measures to vulnerable populations and families that can be impacted by climate emergencies/disasters disaggregated by gender.

Going forward, it is critical for The Bahamas to capture comprehensive and high-quality data. This data will be used to assess the impact of climate change and health interventions. It will also be used to determine the inequalities faced by vulnerable populations across the country.

Ultimately, the data will assist partners and multiple governmental and non-governmental agencies to work on climate change issues. Additionally, climate change data will also streamline decision-making and support the development of appropriate interventions in The Bahamas. This would include an early warning system.

These simple steps will contribute towards shaping the Ministry of Health and Wellness Strategic and Resource Mobilization plans. Training will also be provided to key officials who operate in the climate change and health sector.

As we plot the way forward in a post-COVID-19 world, with the unfortunate promise of increasing events caused by a worsening climate. The Bahamas must agree with and implement the next steps required to protect the citizens and residents of The Bahamas and fulfill our obligations under the Developing a Climate Resilient Health System in The Bahamas project. This includes: -

1. **An Inception Report and detailed work plan**
2. **A needs, technological and infrastructural assessment of the current surveillance system.**
3. **Human resources, Knowledge, Attitude, Practice and Capacity Assessment Survey targeting key stakeholder groups** including a component on gender matters
4. **Public Health Surveillance System**
5. **Training workshops** and
6. **A Final Project Report**

The World Health Organization advises that Climate change is the single biggest health threat facing humanity, and health professionals worldwide. Health professionals are already responding to the health

harms caused by this unfolding crisis, and so are we. Global heating of 1.5°C is not considered safe. Consequently, a tenth of a degree of warming will take a serious toll on people's lives and health. Therefore, we must make sustained progress now to see the unique benefits that come with appreciating the effects of climate change and health.