

**REPORT BY**

**The Hon Iram Lewis**

**Minister of State for the Ministry of  
Disaster Preparedness, Management  
and Reconstruction**

**On**

**Thursday, October 29, 2020**

My Fellow Bahamians,  
Good Afternoon.

I begin by taking this opportunity to thank the hard-working and dedicated staff of The Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA), as well as our many public and private partners for their overwhelming support in preparing for, responding to and assisting with the recovery and re-building efforts resulting from Hurricane Dorian and in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The past year has been one filled with unprecedented challenges for The Bahamas. On the heels of hurricane Dorian, we were faced with a

once in a generation pandemic of COVID-19. Through these trying times, it is important that we each do our part, continue to exercise caution and follow safety protocols to safeguard not only our own health, but also the health of the most vulnerable among us, including our loved ones.

Hurricane Dorian not only uprooted the lives of thousands of Bahamians, it also disrupted the status quo and made clear the fact that now is the time for action. Climate Change is a global reality and it is affecting The Bahamas. We have been faced with the choice to either continue down the path we have always travelled, or to adjust course to avoid the catastrophe staring us in the eyes.

When the Government of The Bahamas enacted the Disaster Preparedness Response Act in 2006 it adopted the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) strategy.

This strategy is an integrated approach to disaster management that encompasses the management of all hazards through all phases of the disaster management cycle – namely, prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation.

It involves the public and private sectors, as well as all segments of civil society and the general population. The goal of CDM is to enhance efforts aimed at sustainable development by reducing risks and losses associated with natural and technological hazards and the effects of climate change.

Government's commitment to the CDM Strategy was further cemented when the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA) were formed to work in harmony with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) following the severe impact that hurricane Dorian had upon The Bahamas in early September 2019, which resulted in extensive loss and damage.

The Bahamas Government, with the assistance of local and international partners, has invested heavily over the years, in disaster preparedness and response. Although The Bahamas has been improving in the area of disaster preparedness and response, there is still much more to be done.

Hurricanes are becoming more ferocious and frequent. The intensity of these hurricanes, rising sea levels, destruction of our communities built along the shoreline, and the destruction of our ecosystem around fisheries and marine life, are all elements of climate change that demand urgent and focused attention.

Following hurricane Dorian it was recognized that there is a need to strengthen existing recovery strategies and move towards a more comprehensive and structured process that includes the articulation of a resilient recovery policy, strategy and implementation plan, with appropriate institutional arrangements. The intent is to ensure that recovery planning operations are well informed, sustainable, efficient and timely. Hence the remit of the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction, that encompasses improving the framework for recovery planning in The Bahamas.

The notion of Building Back Better surfaced following hurricanes Jeanne and Frances; both were category 3 hurricanes that impacted the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama in September 2004 within three weeks of each other. The events of hurricane Dorian in September 2019 catapulted the move to solidifying a policy of building a Resilient State and a shift from recovery as a reactive exercise, to a more comprehensive approach that is proactive and strategic.

As a means of enhancing recovery planning, the Government of The Bahamas requested the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in elaborating recovery coordination and planning. As such, the UNDP engaged the University of the West Indies (UWI) to provide advisory services in the development of a draft policy, strategy and implementation plan, as well as recommendations on the institutional framework, to execute and operationalize the resilient recovery vision.

Post-disaster recovery planning means, making infrastructure resilient, restoring our economy, enhancing our social protection systems, facilitating and enabling paradigm shifts in policy and development planning. And, on a human level, it means ensuring that every person in our country has the knowhow, capacity and resources to rebound stronger after a disaster or pandemic.

The UWI Advisory Team worked in close collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders to frame a suitable Policy Statement for Resilient Recovery in The Bahamas, articulate the critical elements to guide the development of the Recovery Strategy and Implementation Action Plan and, the Institutional Structures needed to support the operationalization of the Resilient Recovery Policy.

The Draft Policy Vision Statement that was developed during the consultations reads as follows:

***The Bahamas is an archipelagic country that prepares for, withstands and recovers from man-made and natural disasters and promotes the safety and quality of life of all its citizens, in resilient and sustainable communities, with access to critical services and infrastructure in all of islands through education and awareness, promotion of respect for the natural and cultural environment, community based approaches and an whole-of-government commitment to resilient development.***

In September of this year, the UWI Advisory Team submitted its reports to my Ministry with recommendations to garner wide national buy-in and ownership for the goal of recovery planning. The reports have

been accepted by my Ministry and endorsed by the Cabinet. In this regard my Ministry will take the follow actions:

1. Organize internal consultations on the Draft Recovery Policy  
- this will include the preparation and sharing of information, notes and policy briefs for heads of key agencies.
2. Convene Meetings to review the roles and responsibilities suggested in the strategy implementation plan and the associated timeframes and make the appropriate adjustments.
3. Distil and develop the necessary guidelines that inform how shared roles can be undertaken for transitional recovery services to be made seamless.
4. Establish a framework for the modalities of capturing, packaging, accessing and sharing of data related to recovery assets, skills, services and spatial information on social assets and vulnerability.
5. Undertake discussions on the metrics for resilient reconstruction.
6. Review existing incentives for recovery and for encouraging risk-sensitive development.



7. Identify and map existing financial instruments that can support recovery and reconstruction programmes, develop a strategy for the effective use of these and provide orientation of the key persons responsible for development and public financial management in the government.
8. Establish a National Private Sector Recovery roundtable to promote a National Agenda for Business Contingency Planning and Continuity Management.
9. Initiate a dialogue on a Resilient Public Service and Continuity of Government; and
10. Establish a timeframe for the review and adoption of a Bahamas Resilient Recovery Policy.

I now brief you on the work of the **National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)**.

With the formation of the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness Management and Reconstruction and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority, NEMA can more focus its attention on disaster mitigation, preparedness and relief response. In essence, assuming a balance approach that includes ex-ante and ex-post activities associated with disaster management.

Following hurricane Dorian, an After Action Review was undertaken to facilitate a comprehensive assessment of some of the key and critical functionalities of our national disaster management system, specifically the Emergency Support Functions and the National Emergency Operations Centre.

That review has resulted in improvements being made to Information Technology Data Management for the enhancement of data collection and information sharing, among other things.

NEMA's website (**nema.gov.bs**) has been upgraded. Three portal areas have been added to the website to provide access to various support groups to holistically communicate on any given situation. These support groups comprise of NGOs, the 14 Emergency Support Functions (EFSSs) and NEMA's internal Administration Staff. Additionally, the public can now access the following services on the NEMA's website:

- Persons affected by a disaster can sign-up online for support and guidance; and
- Persons offering voluntary services can register online for Accreditation and Approval.

NEMA's Call Centre is now digitized; details are logged in by a team and assistance given accordingly. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, NEMA actively assisted with logging calls in its newly established database that has the ability to generate various reports.

The Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction and NEMA continues to work along with the Ministry of Health through its Emergency Operation Center (EOC) providing advice and mobilizing resources to assist with combating the Coronavirus Pandemic. It is noteworthy that NEMA was most instrumental in coordinating a team of volunteers to assist with managing government quarantine sites for Bahamian nationals and residents who returned from the United States.

NEMA, in collaboration with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), was able to coordinate the delivery of three shipments of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE's) to The Bahamas. The donations were from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Caribbean Development Bank, and the Jack Ma Foundation. All items secured through CDEMA, were turned over to the Ministry of Health to assist with ongoing COVID -19 operations.

Adherence to COVID-19 protocols resulted in NEMA having to conduct most of its training activities virtually. A planned full-scale simulation exercise dubbed “Restore Island Cays” that was designed to simulate a category-4 Hurricane and test the adjustments made post hurricane Dorian to the National Hurricane Preparedness Plan, was scaled back to a table top exercise. The exercise was conducted with the participation of Government Agencies, the Bahamas Red Cross, the Pacific Disaster Centre (PDC), Global Support and Development (GSD) and U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM).

Given the required changes that were implemented in designated shelters due to COVID-19, specialized training was conducted on Shelters and Shelter Management. NEMA in conjunction with **USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance**, also provided training in **Initial Damage Assessment (IDA)**.

The recent receipt of a donation of \$3.8 million dollars worth of equipment and supplies from the United States Government, through the U.S. Northern Command, followed months of weekly meetings to clearly identify critical needs and the resources suitable to match our needs. The equipment and supplies include:

- Twelve (12), 16 feet medical Whaly rescue boats that are outfitted with 40-HP Yamaha engines, safety stretchers, life vests and 20 foot trailers.
- Emergency Relief Supplies to augment stocks in the three (3) Emergency Relief Warehouses that are situated on Great Inagua, Grand Bahama and at the Coral Harbour Base.
- Personal protection equipment (PPE's) to guard against COVID-19 and to support the shelter programme in Family Islands.
- Communication support supplies for Motorola Handheld Radios that are used in the national inter-agency trunking communication system.
- Materials to repair Government-designated hurricane shelters in Grand Bahama and Abaco that sustained damages during hurricane Dorian; and
- Mobile air-conditioned shelters with back-up electrical supply, kitchen and personal hygiene facilities to provide for rapid and efficient sheltering for affected persons.

A portion of the sheltering facility was erected and is currently in use at the South Beach Clinic to assist with providing medical attention to clients during this COVID-19 pandemic.

These equipment and supplies position our communities to better prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters.

Prior to Hurricane Dorian, NEMA in collaboration with the US Northern Command, planned to conduct a series of refresher Flood Water Rescue and Volunteer Fire Fighting Training Courses on twelve (12) Family Islands where equipment had been delivered and previous training courses have been conducted. The refresher training courses will resume, once protocols to suppress the spread of COVID-19 are relaxed.

Also prior to Hurricane Dorian, NEMA engaged three (3) local companies to install a series of VHF radios and repeaters in twelve (12) Family Island to support the local disaster communications programs. The installation process will resume once travel challenges are resolved.

NEMA continues to work with local, regional and international partners seeking out opportunities for knowledge exchange and mobilizing

resources, to assist with capacity building in areas of disaster management throughout the country.

The National Emergency Management Agency is partnering with the Pacific Disaster Center (PDC) in conducting a National Disaster Preparedness Baseline Assessment. The Baseline Assessment is a sustainable system for accessing, understanding, updating, and applying critical risk information in decision making. The Assessment provides the necessary tools, scientific data, and evidence-based practices to effectively reduce disaster risk. The process includes Risk and Vulnerability Analysis which examines several components of risk including exposure to hazards, vulnerability, coping capability, and existing disaster management capabilities.

In summary, the information emerging from the assessment will add value to decision-making at the national and local levels. Completion of the assessment, which was launched in June of 2019, has been slightly delayed due to restrictions in movements to curtail the spread of COVID -19.

Today, in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, NEMA continues to transport basic disaster relief supplies from its emergency relief

warehouse in New Providence for persons in need in Grand Bahama, Abaco, and amongst various charitable organizations in New Providence.

NEMA is now implementing fifteen (15) contracts as a part of a collaborative effort with the United States Northern Command to repair a number of government designated shelters that were damaged a result of Hurricane Dorian. Thirteen (13) of these shelters are in Grand Bahama and two (2) are in Abaco.

NEMA has received approval in principle from CDEMA for funding three (3) projects valued at \$10,000.00 each. The funding has been earmarked for:

- (i) Logistics and Warehouse Management training;
- (ii) Community Emergency Response Team training; and
- (iii) Radio Operators training in the Family Islands.

NEMA continues to collaborate with other Ministries and Departments to implement the milestones and indicators in the Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Plan for The Bahamas. The Plan, which was crafted with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), was a prerequisite for The Bahamas qualifying for a \$100 million



Contingent Credit Facility Loan prior to Hurricane Dorian. The Contingent Credit Facility for Natural Disasters Emergencies is one of the IDB's main tools to help countries develop effective strategies for natural disaster financial risk management. The Plan focuses on the following key pillars: -

- (i) Disaster Risk Management Governance;
- (ii) Risk Identification;
- (iii) Risk Reduction;
- (iv) Preparation for Emergency and Response; and
- (v) Financial Protection and Risk Transfer

The Ministry of Disaster Preparedness Management and Reconstruction, and other key agencies such as the Ministry of Finance and the Department of Meteorology, will continue to collaborate with the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) to ensure that The Bahamas obtains the most cost effective policy options for tropical cyclones and excessive rainfall events.

CCRIF limits the financial impact of natural hazards to governments by quickly providing short –term liquidity when a policy is triggered. CCRIF has made two payouts totaling US \$12.8 million to the Government of The Bahamas following the passage of Hurricane Dorian.

We are seeking to determine the cost effectiveness of the fisheries industry and utility corporations participating in the CCRIF insurance program so that they too are able to be in a position to receive some short - term liquidity if those sectors are severely impacted by a natural disaster.

### Guide to Housing Standards for The Bahamas.

It my pleasure to launch the release of the ***Guide to Housing Standards for The Bahamas - Build Back Better***. This Guide was produced by the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness Management and Reconstruction in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Works. The Guide could not have been prepared without the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, Engineers Without Borders, Shelters Sector Bahamas, NEMA, the Building Control Department of the Ministry of Public Works, the University of the Bahamas School of Architecture and private sector engineers, architects and contractors.

The impact of Hurricane Dorian on the housing stock of the second and third most populated islands of The Bahamas, namely Grand Bahama and Abaco, resulted in damage to residences that is estimated to exceed one hundred million dollars (B\$100,000,000). The Disaster

Reconstruction Authority through its home repairs program has registered over four thousand residents for home repairs on the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama. As of July 1<sup>st</sup> 2020, the Grand Bahama Port Authority estimated that, within the two hundred square mile district of the Port Authority, approximately 4,637 homes were impacted to varying degrees by the storm.

Rapid assessments were conducted in the aftermath of hurricane Dorian by teams of local professional architects, engineers, building contractors and Ministry of Public Works technical officers. The site inspections revealed that, as expected, there was extensive damage due to flooding from wind and sea surge. However, for the damage not related to wind and sea surge, damage was largely due to the level of non-compliance with the prescriptive requirements of the current Bahamas Building Code.

In an effort to increase building resilienc and to ensure that reconstruction, renovation, repair and new construction to residential buildings adhere *Build Back Better* principles, this Build Back Better Guide serves as an easy reference tool for construction methods and detailsthat comply with the minimum standard of the Bahamas Building Code and local Construction Manual for Small Buildings.

It is therefore our hope that as we seek to rebuild to mitigate against future hurricanes, homeowners, builders and contractors will become familiarized with and adhere to code compliance.

Hard copies of the publication will be available at various locations including NEMA, the DRA, the Ministry of Public Works, hardware stores, and Chambers of Commerce. Electronic versions of the publication are available on the websites of NEMA, the DRA and other agencies.

### **DRA Contribution**

On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019 the Disaster Reconstruction Authority began its rebuilding efforts in Abaco its Cays and in Grand Bahama.

As a result of the level of devastation, steps were taken to evaluate the most urgent needs and to develop work programmes around seven (7) reconstruction priorities, namely: Environment, Education, Economy, Health, Housing, Infrastructure and System Improvements. It was determined that the areas requiring immediate attention included: debris management, community and marine clean up, development of a small home repair assistance program, housing (for temporary,

medium and long term solutions), school repairs and construction of community centers that would also serve as hurricane shelters.

Significant progress has been made with reconstruction efforts and I now invite the Project Director of the Disaster Reconstruction Authority, Mr. Wendell Grant to share that progress with you.

### CLOSING REMARKS

The Ministry of Disaster Preparedness Management and Reconstruction remains committed to ensuring that its programmes and projects are executed with the spirit that embodies its policy vision statement.

Currently, no effort is being spared to restore Abaco and Grand Bahama. The task of reconstruction is great.

It is not a sprint; it is a journey

Complete recovery will not happen overnight.

With all of us working together, I am confident, that with God's Grace, we will achieve a more resilient and sustainable Bahamas.

I THANK YOU and I now turn it over to Permanent Secretary Carl Smith.